ELEMENTS OF MEDIEVAL ROMANCE IN IRIS MURDOCH

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Submitted to the faculty of the University Graduate School
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the degree
Master of Liberal Studies
in the Department of English
Indiana University at South Bend

August 2000

Accepted by the Graduate Faculty, Indiana University at South Bend, in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Liberal Studies.

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This is to acknowledge all of the assistance I have received in writing this thesis. First and foremost, I thank my thesis director, Dr. James Blodgett, whose course on medieval and modern romance provided the original idea for this thesis. Dr. Blodgett's excellent and imminently patient guidance was very much appreciated. Second, I thank both Dr. Margaret Scanlan and Dr. Glenn Chestnut for their valuable critiques. All of these professors have graciously given me their time and encouragement, and I have greatly benefited from their knowledge and expertise.

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ROMANCE

The title of this work may mislead readers into thinking that the novels of Iris Murdoch make use of an outdated period and are, therefore, irrelevant to modern times; however, nothing could be further from the truth, for Murdoch presents a challenge to contemporary society. This is a challenge which asks for a reevaluation of present beliefs and the consideration of a new philosophy. To clarify this challenge, she uses well-drawn characters, with whom we can identify, to demonstrate that the philosophical-religious systems that humankind has endorsed in the past are now unworkable. Instead she proposes modern realism, a philosophy that she considers appropriate to contemporary society. This is a demanding and difficult philosophy, requiring a selflessness not easily gained, but one which her characters must confront. In order to achieve her purpose, Murodch then uses the elements of medieval romance, showing how society is inculcated with the code of courtly love, the tenets of chivalry, and the trappings of Christianity which came from the Middle Ages, elements that Murdoch believes to be detrimental to our present society. Thus Murdoch's characters are enmeshed in past creeds that need reevaluation, and she expects the readers to participate in this reevalutation; however, to fully analyze Murdoch's novels and the modern realism she espouses, a

cursory knowledge of both the romance tradition and a sense of the historical perspective are also needed.

In any discussion of romance, one must first look at the elements that have comprised the genre. For whether one seeks to explain medieval or modern romance one finds common elements such as: idealism, challenge and quest, the extraordinary, and stylized or archetypal characters.

The first and most important component of the romance is the idealism, which is its main concern. This idealism may be linked to a particular period of time, but each age has ideals that it proclaims, those that even the common person affirms and dreams of accomplishing. Romance involves a world that remains constant within all men, the world of imagination and dream (Beer 7), in other words, a world of ideals. There is a need, then, for human beings to embrace the romantic, for by doing so, we are taken out of the ordinary into a lofty realm of perfection toward which we must strive if our world is to have meaning. Whether we seek ideal love, honor, or moral perfection, we seek that which is normally beyond us, not in possibility perhaps, but certainly in probability. Within romance we affirm codes that will not be compromised, those that must be maintained despite the experience of sorrow, betrayal, or sin. If we dispense with our ideals, there is no need for romance, but in doing so, we also sacrifice our dreams, and that

sacrifice is too great, according to the romantic. Iris Murdoch, however, relegates romance to immature imaginings, fantasies and dreams that cannot be part of a modern world in which one must squarely face reality and pragmatically strive for goodness. For Murdoch it will not do simply to imagine the impossible dream; one must actively work toward it. Granted, the hero or heroine of romance works toward the ideal, but when faced with less than perfection, he or she is able to take refuge in the conception that there are absolute ideals that exist whether they are attained or are not.

Murdoch is like the romantic in that she, too, envisions an ideal of perfection, but she is unlike the romantic in that her ideal of perfection and its possibilities lie only within the individual. There is no God, no love, no philosophy. no refuge in dreams or fantasies that remain outside of the self. There is only action and one's individual struggle for good within the world of one's personal existence. Absolutes do not exist. Her characters are bound to an activism that cannot be soothed by a god or a heroine; they must instead attend only to the demands of goodness, a goodness which they alone can accomplish. Nonetheless, Murdoch makes liberal use of the romance tradition in her writings, but this use is simply to unveil the feet of clay upon which romance's absolutes rest.

This is not to say, however, that those who adhered to the absolutes of the romance tradition, in any of its facets, failed to see the dichotomy between belief and attainment, for this was a common subject among writers such as Chretien de Troyes, Geoffrey Chaucer and Guillaume de Lorris.

Within the romance genre there are also conventional motifs which include: the mysteriousness of the challenge or summons, the loneliness and isolation of the hero or heroine as he or she undergoes the romance journey through a hostile environment, the first sight of the beloved, and the single combat against overwhelming odds or a monstrous opponent. In addition, the medium of the romance is adventure, and the quest provides its structure. Romance, however, is manifested variously according to the particular age in which it is found, for the models of perfection used are those accepted by the society in which they occur. As Gillian Beer notes, "It [romance] is usually acutely fashionable, cast in the exact mould of an age's sensibility" (12). Thus any romance reflects the accepted tenets of the time in which it is created, but since these desired models of perfection are generally unattainable by the multitude, the romance gives repetitive form to these desires which cannot find controlled expression within a society (Beer 13). It does so by simultaneously stepping outside of reality into the realm of idealism, as W. R.

Barron explains when he says that the fundamental attribute shared among romances is the representation of life as it is *and* as it might be, as imperfect reality *and* imagined ideal in one (6). Romance, then, reflects the mentality of an age yet, at the same time, transcends that reality by choosing to dwell on romantic ideals that relieve the ever-present ennui of life. Even in our modern, cynical times we are "masters of science, manipulators of birth and makers of mass death, [who] dream of flight from a polluted earth to clean new worlds beyond the stars, calling it romance and rivaling each other to make it reality" (Barron 1). Therefore, despite the contemporary utterances that romance is dead, it is with us still, reflected in proliferation of the cheap romance novel, in the television show that dramatizes the life of the rich and the beautiful, and in science fiction that takes us completely out of the world of our everyday reality. In the fiction of Iris Murdoch, these reflections of romance are much in evidence, for in her choice of upper middle-class characters, she too, dramatizes the life of the rich and the beautiful. In her characters' search for meaning there is also the perfection, an ideal good that lies beyond attainment, and there are the flights of fancy that allow the escape from reality—even, at times, into fantasy.

Despite the fact that romances reflect specific periods

in history, there are particular tales, told and retold in various versions, which embody universal ideals (Barron 7). These are expressed in common themes that weave themselves through all ages, themes concerned with the same essential experiences of love, honour, valour, fear, and self-knowledge (Barron 4). They are constant and unchanged because they are of the essence of Western humanism. They tell of the intensity of love, the desire to stand above the ordinary, the fear of failure, of death, and the need to know the significance of life.

Thus the romances which best express these themes have constant appeal, and the characters who embody the idealism they espouse are given the status of hero and heroine. Because humankind needs ideals to give voice to the best possibilities of its nature, so, too, does it need heroes and heroines to give them human form. The mythic gods or goddesses would not do as they were too far removed, too far beyond humans to allow them a bond, an identification with themselves, despite the human qualities they evinced. These mythical figures were supernatural; humans were natural. Needed instead was the superlative being who was extraordinary in degree but not of a different kind (Barron 6). Romance fulfills the need with its use of superior individuals who fall within the realm of possibility but whose feats are somehow beyond the ordinary. When these

characters are heroes or heroines, they exhibit uncommon skill, morals, courage or wisdom, or in the case of the villain, extraordinary malevolence. These are individuals who can rise to the idealistic tasks set for them. We look to them to take the challenge given, to endure the trials and to overcome the obstacles presented to reach our ideals, or in the case of evil, to reach the depths of our censure. Thus they must be somewhat outside the reality of daily living. Northrop Frye says of them:

> The romancer does not attempt to create 'real people'so much as stylized figures which expand into psychological archetypes. It is in the romance that we find Jung's libido, anima, and shadow reflected in the hero, heroine, and villain respectively. That is why the romance so often radiates a glow of subjective intensity that the novel lacks, and why a suggestion of allegory is constantly creeping in around its fringes. (qtd. in Barron 15)

One can see this "suggestion of allegory" in such works of Murdoch as *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* in which the characters of Tallis and Julius represent the archetypes of good and evil and in the gothic tale of *The Unicorn*. In the latter work Christianity, Platonism and Modern Realism vie for supremacy in the guise of Hannah, Max, Marian and Effingham. These characters, as other romance figures, become akin to our own psychological nature, giving voice to the hidden desires or the hidden fears of our being, playing

upon our affinity for the dramatic. The romance indulges us, gives us our dreams and briefly hides the inconsistencies and obstacles of life behind its magical facade. They make our desires for the philosophical ideal a reality.

The challenges that face the romantic character are those that face the ordinary individual: "Maturation through struggle, independence from parental influence, self-realization, the establishment of wider personal relationships, and integration with society" (Barron 3). The obstacles confronting the hero and heroine, however, often involve implausible and improbable situations, which have their meaning not in the adventures themselves necessarily, but in the final resolutions that give meaning to them. We can overlook the improbability of these fantastic adventures if their meaning relates to the individual consciousness. If the heroine can overcome all difficulties in winning her true love, so can we. If the hero is able to use his intelligence to outwit a formidable opponent, we too can do so. Does it matter how or when these feats occur, whether they be fantasy or in closer touch with actual reality, or do they engage us simply because the basic desires of humans are fulfilled in glorious affirmation of our imaginings? In romance all things are possible. The specific challenge is not as

important as the fact that all humans face the same basic types of challenges. The specific ordeal or journey, though it may be implausible, retains meaning because all humans undergo an ordeal of sorts and journey through some kind of "hostile territory" in life whether it be filled with evil monsters or the evil of drugs, with alien beings or with formidable societal obstacles. Therefore, though the challenges and quests differ from age to age, their rationale does not. One example is the initiation into adulthood that characters as diverse as Chretien de Troyes's Percival and Iris Murdoch's Moy (*GK*) undergo. A second example is the search for goodness and meaning taken by Bellamy in *The Green Knight* and Gawain in the fourteenth century counterpart. Third, there is the obsession of love between Malory's Guinevere and Lancelot and Murdoch's Kate and Ducane of *The Nice and the Good.* These initiations, challenges, loves are with us still. It is important to note, however, that though a hero's or heroine's romantic fancies soar to unrealistic heights, the idealism they endorse may be firmly rooted in conventional philosophy or religion. In Iris Murdoch's novels, the treatment of Christianity would be one such example; however, the ideal has a part in most of the philosophical or religious systems which Iris Murdoch treats in her novels.

What then of the settings of romance? Given the

transcendent nature of the genre, we would expect the romance to be staged in an unrealistic setting. As Barron notes:

> The need to express fundamental human concerns in the heightened terms of idealism leads the authors of romance to exploit a technique of superlatives: extraordinary, even supernatural, incidents, exotic settings, fabulous trappings, and properties which function as images as much as objects. (5)

And so we have such landscapes as the monster-ridden and inimical forests that appear in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, the bridge of swords in Chretien de Troyes, the strangely barren land forms that appear on an alien planet in the modern *Star Wars*--and the remote, almost surrealistic landscape of Iris Murdoch's *The Unicorn*. The "Murdochian Court" mentioned by Peter Conradi (143) also brings in the past wherein the prosperous of our age mirror the aristocratic courts of the Middle Ages, courts like that of King Arthur wherein harmony and good will were revered yet often challenged by outside forces. These are the settings of romance because they provide symbolic backgrounds to the drama of romantic imaginings. Because they are psychologically suited to our fantasies, they are as much landscapes of the mind and its labyrinthine workings as they are of some external reality. Also, settings often invoke the past in allusions to ages or events that have occurred

long ago and have lasting meaning. Here Murdoch uses medievalism to give a concrete base to her fiction, but this has two purposes. One is to give the sense of reality that the historical evokes. A second is to give a sense of unreality. This is true because the past cannot be real to us in any physical sense, and we are, therefore, forced to know it only through the nonphysical eye of the mind.

The epitome of the setting based in unreality occurs in *The Unicorn* where characters interact in the fairytale arena of Gaze Castle. These further enhance the feeling that the romance occurs outside of present reality and adds to the sense of the marvelous or extraordinary factors that are so much a part of the genre.

The medieval romance, while following the general design of the romance genre, has its own conventions, which are reflective of the sensibility of the times. In the following quotation Barron refers to the code of courtly romance, which was so much a part of medieval mores:

> What was new [in the Middle Ages] was the frankness and fascination with which the *romanz* narratives expressed the interests of the age, above all the concept of a love demanding absolute, mutual commitment devoid of the social restrictions and self-interest of feudal match-making, inspiring and controlling for socially valid purposes the chivalric energies which were a threat to good order in a violent age. (8)

The characteristic motifs employed in the medieval romance exemplified love as deriving from sudden illumination, as essentially private and secret, as intensified by frustration and difficulty, and as lifting the lovers to a new level of being (Stevens 34). Andreas Capellanus set forth the rules of love in the thirteenth century in his *De Arte Honeste Amandi*, which owed its inspiration to Ovid's *Ars Amatoria* (Stevens 30). The instructions of this code cautioned the lover to avoid avarice and falsehood, to be courteous, obedient, faithful to one Lady, and discreet. In addition, jealousy was a requisite of love, and love usually found its fulfillment in adultery though one could love within a marriage (Stevens 31). It is well to remember, however, that this code applied to the aristocratic members of society and not necessarily to those below them. As in much romance, the rich are glorified because they are envied, and their desirable position gains them the approbation and emulation of the rest of society. In medieval times it was the aristocrats who had the leisure to love with the kind of obsession glorified in the courtly love code, a leisure not available to the peasant. Therefore, the code was applied only to the upper class.

Courtly love was obsessive, its intensity obliterating reason and usefulness as it did Troilus in Chaucer's *Troilus*

and Criseyde and Lancelot in Chretien de Troyes's *Knight of the Cart*. Both Troilus and Lancelot abandoned all reason, Troilus to the point of actual physical distress for want of Criseyde, and Lancelot in choosing one of society's biggest disgraces--the ignominy of the felon's cart--in his search for Guinevere. The epitome of this obsessive love is shown when Guinevere, upon being found, fails to acknowledge the disgrace suffered by Lancelot for this action and eschews Lancelot's attention because he hesitated for a slight moment before he climbed into the cart. Here Chretien's sarcasm is at its peak, for this occurs after Lancelot has proven his love by undergoing many a dire circumstance simply to rescue Guinevere. Therefore, her pique becomes ridiculous and demonstrates the self-absorption at its base. This self-absorption takes on an even deeper meaning when one considers the obsessed lover shown in the first part of Guillaume de Lorris's *Romance of the Rose*, an allegorical portrayal of a lover's pursuit of his beloved.

One must note here that the obsession is simply pure physical passion, often tawdry and self-serving. The selfishness of this kind of obsessive love is particularly emphasized when Guillaume de Lorris takes the Lover to the pool of Narcissus. By using Narcissus, de Lorris is essentially emphasizing the role the self plays in this battle of the sexes. This facade of courtly love is also

pierced by Chretien de Troyes when he uses his taunting tone, not only to show how a knight of such reputation as Lancelot can be reduced to the depths of the cart, but also to illuminate the fact that the romance between Lancelot and Guinevere is adultery, an illicit and harmful liaison. Similarly, Jean de Meun's portion of *Romance of the Rose* censures the actual sexual encounter between the lover and beloved by describing it in almost brutal terms. Even religion is mocked here in the devout pilgrim's "staff" and "sack" symbols, distorted here as the penis and scrotum. The beloved Rose, too, is given coarse and vulgar treatment, for she is merely object, pillars with an aperture within which the Lover "jousts" without the slightest thought to the wishes or feelings of the Rose. There is no higher purpose in this consummation; it fails even to accord the Rose continuing fidelity to the Lover. There is no "courtliness," no transcendence of lover or beloved, there is merely base physical satiation, narcissistic and lustful. Thus the idealized romantic love with its protestations of eternal fidelity and romantic obsession proves often to cloak what is merely physical passion. Even in the elevation of Troilus's love in Chaucer's work there is, at the onset, deceit and pandering in order to gain Criseyde's favors. There is baseness here, and Chaucer wants his readers to realize it. He, too, seems to be saying that even the most

praiseworthy of loves can have its moments of unreasoned and unromantic physical lust. All is not ideal in the courtly love code, or else it is simply that the code--like every other ideal--cannot be perfectly adhered to because it, too, is subject to humans' lapses and imperfections. Barron comments on this duality of courtly romance, the personal idealism versus the often tawdry realism. Murdoch employs this duality of courtly love when she creates the triad of Kate, Octavian and Ducane in *The Nice and the Good* wherein a seemingly innocent friendship masks the titillating aspect of having an extramarital admirer. There is even less innocence in the triad of Morgan, Rupert, and Hilda in *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*.

If the concept of courtly romance embodied the personal ideal, then chivalry embodied the social ideal. Here was required proof to society that one had individual excellence and could prove his worth to the social body. Included was fidelity to the overlord and the solitary quest for identity, a quest whose obstacles encompassed the unexpected, the supernatural, and the providential (Barron 153). This overriding chivalric code proves its importance in Malory's *Morte d'Arthur* when Arthur states that he would rather sacrifice his queen than destroy the fellowship of his knights. In essence, Arthur could get another queen, but such knights as his and the fellowship among them all

were indispensable. (Malory 773). Perhaps the reason for Arthur's seemingly callous proclamation was the realization that the fellowship and fidelity of the ruling Round Table represented a social function rather than a personal one. A personal one, then, must be subordinate to the public, for the impact on society had to be the prime consideration. Thus the medieval romance seems to reflect both personal ideals in the courtly love code and social ideals in the code of chivalry. It must also be noted, however, that the intense loyalty to the overlord and the insistence on personal superiority in battle, which are inherent in chivalry, also led to the violence of the age. So the duality seen between an elevated ideal romance evidenced in courtly love and its dark side of pure physical lust is seen also in chivalry in the idealism of the Round Table and its dark side of territorial and personal violence.

Despite criticisms of the courtly love tradition, the medieval age was one in which the spiritual and moral universe was the real intelligible universe and the world merely a shadow (Stevens 26, 28). Chretien's "Percival" embodied the experience of one who went beyond the mere obsessions of a worldly love in his pursuit of the divine. It is necessary to note, however, that the medieval narratives were to be read always on more than one level of meaning, for the prevalent attitude of the age saw all

physical, mental and spiritual phenomena as interrelated expressions of divine will (Barron 5). Thus any search for the reality of an ideal love also embodied spiritual elements that elevated the hero or heroine since all realities were considered spiritual and transcendent. One has only to refer to the incident when Chretien's Percival contemplates the three drops of blood in the snow to see the workings of these multiple levels of meaning. First, as is brought out in the work, the snow reminds Percival of the white skin of his beloved. Snow, however, would seem also to indicate purity on a spiritual plane. So, too, with the drops of blood that emphasized the red of the beloved's cheeks and lips. Here again, if one is to be aware of multiple levels, there is the suggestion that the magical number of three indicates the Christian trinity. Then there is the reminder of the blood that Christ shed as well as the sexual connotation of blood that would be shed in the deflowering of the virgin, Blanche Fleur. In addition, Percival's rapt contemplation speaks of the obsession of the courtly lover. The symbolic essence of all these could easily be intertwined to suggest multiple levels of meaning.

Murdoch, too, employs many levels of meaning in her novels. In *The Green Knight* the character of Mir alone embodies both the ancient green knight, Gawain and the modern knight; the socially idealized upper middle-class

member; charlatan; savior; and Abel of the Bible with all the multiple levels of meaning these embodiments imply. But the "idea of a `double truth,' a truth which belongs to reason and a truth which belongs to revelation, was especially popular at this [medieval] time" (Stevens 32). Stevens mentions this in regard to Capellanus's *De Amore*, but the duality of this work, that speaks first of love then, almost hypocritically, of the virtue of abstinence rewarded by God, can also be seen in other medieval romance. An example largely comparable to the duality of Capellanus is that which occurs after the first revelation of the lover in the *Romance of the Rose* where reason is pitted against the lover's obsessive passion--to no avail as far as the lover is concerned, but the lover's mental state is discounted by the reader at the end of the second part since the vulgarity of his possession of the rose negates any high principle that the courtly love tradition would advocate and thus gives the kind of love Reason advocates a much stronger argument. The same duality seems also to apply elsewhere in medieval romance, especially if one applies it to Capellanus's work, as Stevens does. For Chaucer, Chretien, and Jean de Meun all pit the obsession of love against higher principles--those of both a divine and a reasonable nature. This kind of duality is seen in Murdoch's work in the heady idealization of romance pitted

against the contingent reality of modern realism, a realism that exposes the underbelly of romance, that which tears at the ideal fiber. The adultery of Octavian in NG is one such instance in which the ideal is shown to have an ignoble side, and Hannah's seduction by Gerald is clearly a degrading incident, both for Hannah and for the other characters.

The unknown author of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* presents a duality of another sort, that of the highly civilized as opposed to the natural. In this medieval romance, Gawain, the epitome of knighthood shows cowardice in a weak moment by taking the green girdle because it will protect his life. Here Gawain is portrayed as the best of his time, and because of his lofty position, his personal fallibility becomes symbolic of the fallibility of the principles put forth in Arthur's court. Even he, the most exemplary of knights, is shown, finally, to be merely human, and therefore, to be flawed. This is brought out with a keen yet biting humor when all of King Arthur's court join Gawain in wearing green, a symbol of natural humanity, as it were. They, too, are among the best of society, and one could interpret their actions as a recognition of their very human fallibility. Joining Gawain in his failure, they essentially are letting him know that he should take neither himself nor his code too seriously, an attitude that the

author also wishes the reader to acknowledge. "We are but human," he seems to say to the reader, and such aspirations to piety that Gawain displays are, indeed, presumptuous. This is reinforced with the robust virility of the green knight, a symbol of the natural man, he who derives his being from nature--not from the somewhat affected code of chivalry and courtly love that civilization has wrought. So here the main emphasis is on the natural versus the highly civilized man, a duality of another sort, but also one which encompasses all aspects of courtly love and chivalry.

There are, then, distinctive elements that separate the medieval romance from romance in general. These elements are the courtly love and chivalric codes peculiar to the Middle Ages. One must add, however, that many of the elements of these two bodies of medieval ethics have their origins in earlier literature and also spill over into later romances thus blurring the definitive outlines of all romance.

HISTORY OF THE MIDDLE AGES: A BRIEF OVERVIEW

It is important to get a historical perspective of the medieval period in order to better understand Iris Murdoch's philosophical position, for in any discussion of Murdoch's fiction, one must consider the dimension of time. Since Murdoch employs the elements of the medieval romance as a basis for her novels, she is able to pit the idealism of romance against the modern realism, which she would have her readers embrace.

No examination of the Middle Ages can be complete without a discussion of the code of courtly love. Iris Murdoch makes use of the tradition in a number of instances such as those mentioned in Chapter I and the more complete discussion of the obsession and adultery shown in Chapter IV in *The Nice and the Good.*

In his study of medieval tradition, *The Allegory of Love,* C. S. Lewis observes that there are few real changes in human sentiment, but the code of courtly love is one of these changes (11). Another aspect of the Middle Ages that must be considered is that of Christianity. D. W. Robertson has argued that most work written in the Middle Ages has its basis in Christianity and the hierarchical approach that medieval humankind had toward all aspects of life. In this hierarchy, God in his wisdom was the pinnacle of ordered

phenomena and represented the Christian love that humans should rightly seek. As Robertson says, [This] idea, indeed, was a part of the normal expectation of the medieval reader, and to say that an author intends it is simply to say that he is a Christian" (Robertson 501-2). Much can be said for this position, but whether Robertson is correct or not, Christianity remains as an important influence. Important, too, is the code of chivalry that creates the fellowship and the basis of the feudal courts of the period. Many factors enter into the consideration of these three basic traditions. Among them are the social milieu to which they applied, the position of women in the society, and the use of love as a basis for the ethical system of the courtly love code. One can see the workings of these traditions in the literature of the times, literature that often incorporates real historical personages within the medieval romance as well as within the lyric poetry and chanson de gestes of the period.

One of the most important reasons for studying the medieval code of courtly love is that most of the romantic notions that have come down through the ages to the present are based on this system. Why these particular ethical principles took on the importance they did at that time is unknown, but it can be argued that some of the reasons can be attributed to the makeup of the medieval court and to the

position held by women in medieval society. First, the knights of the court were landless, known only for valorous deeds, courtesy and adultery (Lewis 11). They are idealized and given high social status; in other words, they are desirable--but not necessarily as husbands. Second, women's position in marriage was most often devastatingly inferior. The marriage contract had nothing to do with love and everything to do with economics. One married to improve one's lot in life, one's social and economic position, and in the marriage contract the wife was customarily subordinate to her husband in all ways. Within the idealized confines of the code of courtly love, however, it was the woman who held the higher position because of her lover's obsession. And, indeed, obsession it was. Lewis attributes the inception of the courtly love code to Ovid, who first espoused its virtues; however, Lewis maintains that Ovid's principles were created in joking manner and were not to be taken seriously, certainly not as seriously as did Andreas Capellanus, upon whose tenets it is based. Yet one must also consider the possibility that Andreas Capellanus's work verged on the satiric. One strong argument for this possiblity lies in the final chapter of his work, which suggests the primacy of Christian virtue. Whether this was, indeed, a hint that the courtly love code need be taken with a healthy dose of skepticism is certainly worthy of

conjecture. D.W. Robertson's assertion that all medieval works necessarily were Christian in nature certainly would support this argument. P. G. Walsh, however, in his book, *Andreas Capellanus on Love*, maintains that Andreas was not sufficiently integrated and talented enough to have achieved the more sophisticated irony postulated by Robertson (13). Given the Christian tenor of the times, however, one wonders whether the final book could have been written under the onus of the church's sure censure of the first two books. Whatever the reasons, the explanation of Andreas's intent remains disputed.

Given Iris Murdoch's underlying condemnation of romance, one can expect her to regard the medieval treatise on love as inefficacious for modern humans, which she does. Most certainly she writes of it in jest. One need only to observe the clumsy and humorous preliminaries of the aforementioned adultery between Rupert and Morgan in *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* to ascertain her mockery of the obsession of the romantic love convention. Since the result of this obsession is injurious to all concerned, however, Murdoch also indicates the danger in giving in to such romantic indulgences. In addition, this situation leads not only to the breakup of Rupert's marriage but also to the breakup of the "court" over which Rupert and Hilda preside, a court of friendship and camaraderie that would parallel

the medieval court of King Arthur, a parallel discussed in Chapter V.

Prior to the endorsement of the creed of courtly love as a system of ethics, the intensity of feeling was directed instead to the fidelities of the feudal hall, the fellowship of men, and the hopes and fears wrought by religion. As Lewis states in *The Allegory of Love*: The deepest of worldly emotions in this period is the love of man for man, the mutual love of warriors who die together fighting against odds, and the affection between vassal and lord (9). In short, the sentiment of heterosexual love did not hold much esteem prior to the Middle Ages. One has only to refer to *Beowulf* and the highly developed sense of responsibility that the lords had for their warriors to see an example of the fellowship and fidelities that captured the minds of humans before the sentiment of love took center stage. Indeed, these sentiments of fellowship were not unimportant to the medieval period though they are unimportant in Murdoch's philosophy, for she emphasizes the need to abandon the court rather than preserve it. One wonders, then, why Murdoch would make this choice since goodness and fellowship do not seem antithetical. Two possible reasons come to mind. The first is that the courtly love code is so prevalent in contemporary society and the emphasis on fellowship is scant; the second is that Murdoch's philosophy

is based on achieving the "good" through individual selflessness rather than through the camaraderie fostered in the Middle Ages. As mentioned in Chapter I, Thomas Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur* shows that the kinship of the court was still strongly in evidence. In fact, it is the strength of chivalry's honor pitted against the obsessions of courtly love that cause the downfall of Camelot, for in the final battles of *Le Morte d'Arthur* it is Lancelot's love for Guinevere that begins the chain of events leading to the death of King Arthur, the subsequent fate of Lancelot and the disbanding of the Round Table. Here the adulterous love of Guinevere and Lancelot is pitted against the insistence on tenets ascribed to the honor of the court and the rules by which knights are to be governed. In short, one could not openly embrace the adultery of the queen with a knight, and as a result, all is lost. This is a tale of which Iris Murdoch would approve because the romantic obsession of the medieval code is criticized by Murdoch as being both idealistic and unrealistic for the adult world to which it applies. The downfall of King Arthur and his knights thus fortifies her position, a position which is illustrated in Chapter IV by the trio of Kate, Octavian, and Ducane in *The Nice and the Good*. Murdoch goes a step farther than Malory, however, since she not only condemns the code of courtly love, but by dispersing the court in her

novels, she signifies that the code of chivalry is also ineffectual in modern times.

The tenets of the courtly love code have been treated in the section on medieval romance, so they need not be reiterated here except to say that as a system of ethics they provided a civilizing influence in a rather barbaric age and dealt with the sexual aspect of human beings, which the church totally ignored--except as a procreative act. As an aside, one certainly could point to the sexual urge as a necessary part of human reproduction. Therefore, it makes much sense to make it a pleasurable and ethically civilized urge rather than relegating it to either barbaric lust or the dutiful and mechanical act of procreation that the church judged as moral. Courtly love, therefore, gave the reproductive act a more noble status, a status more in keeping with civilized behavior. In a comparison to our own age, one might argue that the modern codes of love have lost, or at the least are losing, the essence of courtly love and are the worse for it. For with the loss, the elevation of women has been deserted, and a consequent return to barbarism can be observed in the increased and violent abuse of women. Perhaps it is simply a falling back on the Victorian view of women as being either angel or whore. Yet this Victorian view had its precedent in the medieval visions of woman as Eve/destroyer or as Ave/savior.

In these dual visions women not given the revered courtesy and adoration due the "good," have only one other designation--the undeserved "whore" and its attendant brutality. Thus a civilized ethics may again be deserted and the desired equality is made a mockery. Murdoch, however, offers yet another vision, also that of love as a redeeming act, but one that does not blind us with romantic conventions that mask the realism beneath.

In looking at Murdoch's philosophical position, one can observe that she, too, is proposing a system of ethics whereby modern civilization will be favorably improved. Thus both medieval and Murdochian modern point to the need of civilization to have a workable code of ethics in order that society can function effectively. The difference between the two lies in the basic Christianity of medieval society versus Murdoch's non-Christian humanism, for in the Middle Ages authors such as Chretien de Troyes and Chaucer minimized the effects of the ethical system of courtly love. In "The Knight of the Cart" Chretien makes a mockery of the obsessions inherent in the courtly love code, and in *Troilus and Criseyde* Chaucer shows in the death of Troilus the achievement of a Christian and spiritual love much beyond that attainable by the mere mortal love espoused by the courtly love code. This is not to say that mortal love is not also important, for one can certainly argue that Chaucer

embraces mortal love as a possible avenue to spiritual love. Of this, Andreas Capellanus would approve, for in his pronouncements, he goes far to complete the parallelism of his god of love with the God of religion (Lewis 37). Embracing human love as an avenue to the spiritual is also seen in Murdoch, for, like the Platonists, she believes that human love can lead to what she designates as the "good." The Murdochian "good," however, is not a religious goal and is one achieved within the confines of mortal life rather than in the eternal life of the soul. Nonetheless, the end results for mortal life may be the same, for a humanism that espouses selflessness and a dedication to others' good is certainly very similar to the charitable love that Christianity advocates and would have the same end in ethical behavior.

It is important to note here, that the medieval mindset that embraced the courtly love code is far different than that which came before. The philosophy of the medieval person recognizes the battle that humans must wage with the temptations in their lives. According to C. S. Lewis, the ancients recognized no such battle. For example, Aristotle thought that the good being faces no temptations. One's goodness, in essence, directs one's behavior; thus one is not tempted to commit immoral acts. This battling of humans to overcome the oftentimes pleasurable but sinful diversions

is new to the medieval mind and commits humankind to an entirely different philosophical position. Thus it represents a major change from the mindset that preceded it. Lewis sees this conflict in moral goodness as being at the base of allegory, which takes us to the writings of the Middle Ages (60).

In the attempt to express the atmosphere of an age, one must look to the writings that it produces. In this vein C. S. Lewis has a lengthy commentary on the allegorical writings of the Middle Ages. He is of the opinion that allegory arose as a literary form because it reflected the whole mental life of the period, a manifestation of the era's spirit. According to Lewis, Statius, in his work the *Thebaid*, shows the beginnings of courtly love literature. By using humans as symbolic of the mythical gods, Statius' allegory legitimizes such propensities of humans as love, war, and revelry, thus providing a bridge between the ancient and the new mental spirit of medievalism and its Christian monotheism. A kindred allegorization in the Middle Ages can be seen in the *Romance of the Rose* wherein the gods are supplanted by human traits that allegorically appear in physical form to support the drama of the lover's seduction of the Rose. One also can view polytheism as a stage in the development of monotheism, a stage in which polytheism is the infancy, monotheism the maturity (Lewis

55). Murdoch, too, in the medieval vein, uses allegory mainly in an attempt to discredit past systems of belief. This is particularly true in *The Unicorn*, a work which uses specific characters to represent systems of belief. One could push the comparison further and state that Murdoch makes use of past ideologies, including romance, to show the infancy or immaturity of these as pitted against the maturity of Murdoch's particular brand of modern realism.

Lewis maintains there are two reasons that allegory reached its fruition in the Middle Ages. One is the change of mythical gods into personifications, the second a widespread moral revolution which forced men to personify their passions. Because the age is dominated by a strict and ascetic Christianity wherein men must subjugate their temptations, it would seem that there is a bursting forth of literary expression in which these passions can be vented, and allegory provides a method for this expression while the code of courtly love provides an ethical system to give credence to such literature.

The anecdotal *Chronicle of the Crusade of St. Louis* by Jean de Joinville is beneficial in illustrating the importance of Christianity as an underlying element of life in the Middle Ages. Completed in the early part of the fourteenth century, it helps one understand both the spirit and the realistic hardships of the crusades. A look at both

of these aspects gives one clearer insight as to the medieval religious mindset and the actuality of death, destruction and intolerance that accompanied the religious intensity.

Within this chronicle, Joinville gives much detail about the adherence to both Christian rituals as well as to charitable actions, but from these memoirs one can also discern the Christian mindset of those with courtly connections. For Christianity is a way of life in Joinville's chronicle, and Joinville himself attributes any good fortune to God. An example of this is shown when Joinville has dispensed the greater part of his wealth during the crusade and was in danger of losing his knights because he could not pay them. At this point he states: "But God, who never failed me yet, provided for me in such fashion that the king...took me into his service" (Joinville 169). In this context, God also punishes unchristian behavior. At one point six knights are disparagingly jesting about a dead man, and Joinville remarks that God took vengeance and all were killed (Joinville 209). In other words, right action yields God's beneficence whereas unchristian behavior draws God's vengeance. These pronouncements, however, are common to Joinville's chronicle and, one would surmise, common to the aristocratic circles of the medieval court as are the prayers said for victory in

battle, for safety, even for nature's beneficence. Murdoch would agree that right or good action yields beneficence, for in her thinking, this is effort made to achieve what she terms, "good"; however, the beneficence she envisions involves a divestiture of self rather than the acquisition of individual reward that Joinville sees as a result of Christian action.

The Christian spirit that drove the crusades is quite evident in the king's action when first disembarking to fight the Saracens. In hearing that his people were on shore, the king leapt into the sea with shield hanging on his neck, helmet on head, and lance in hand and waded to shore till he reached his people:

> When he reached the land, and looked upon the Saracens, he asked what people they were, and they told him they were Saracens; and he put his lance to his shoulder, and his shield before him, and would have run in upon the Saracens if the right men who were about him would have suffered it. (175)

Here the king is supposedly filled with such a religious fervor that he is foolhardy, and Joinville would cite this as an example of the power Christianity had over individual action. Whether this, in truth, could be attributed to religious fervor or simply to untoward passion for vengeance is certainly debatable; however, Joinville's text indicates that King Louis is one who not only espouses Christianity,

but is one who also adheres to Christian principles. It was stated:

> The king was such a large alms-giver that wherever he went in his kingdom he caused money to be given to the poor churches, to the lazar houses, to the alms-houses, to the hospitals, and to the poor gentlemen and gentlewomen. Every day he gave food to a great number of poor folk, beside those who ate in his chamber. (310)

This is one of the examples of the altruistic and compassionate actions of the king who is referred to as Saint Louis, for not only was he canonized after his death, he was loved and revered by the people to whom he showed his kindness. Nonetheless, history would deem his participation in the Crusades as much less than kind.

That the Crusades were debacles as well as professed victories is evident in the tremendous loss of life among those of the king's host as well as among the poorer pilgrims who joined them. To our modern eye, they are of course, monuments to intolerance and fanaticism, but in the spirit of the Middle Ages, that spirit which touted a narrow and dogmatic Christianity, these expeditions brought mercy and forgiveness from God.

Though the life of the court is interwoven with the tenets of Christianity and its demands, it also promotes the arts and embraces the courtly love code. These are shown in the courts of Eleanor of Aquitaine, a well-read, intelligent

woman who fostered the arts whenever possible. Such well-known writers as Andreas Capellanus and Chretien de Troyes were brought to Eleanor's court by Marie de Champagne, a daughter of Eleanor and King Louis VII of France. In his book on Eleanor of Aquitaine, Curtis Walker mentions these authors and the works of Ovid and Boethius as popular among the elite of the times. Since artists had little support other than patrons, their work was often subject to the whims of the aristocratic and wealthy of the courts. Thus many medieval works flatter the elite and reflect their values. For example, in "The Knight of the Cart" Chretien de Troyes makes mention of his patroness and the subject she wished him to develop. In similar vein, Murdoch's characters feature those drawn from the ranks of the upper-middle class, that class which would not only provide the largest number of purchasers for her novels, but also the class which has the greatest influence on society's tastes and mores. In fact, her choice of characters is often criticized as being too limited because of their elite backgrounds.

The courts, however, despite being the prime promoters of the arts, were also in constant flux due to the incessant rivalries and warring factions of their rulers. The sons of Henry II, for example, vied for the power of their father, and their mother, the queen, willingly assisted them.

English and French factions constantly were at each other's throats, enlisting whatever support they could muster from lesser courts whose loyalties seemed to waver depending on the personal advantage at hand.

Thus the times seemed to have little order or loyalty, resulting in a civilization whose ethics seemed to be largely pragmatic despite Christianity's influence. Therefore, the idea of the courtly love code in which courtesy and loyalty were of prime importance, brought a semblance of civilized behavior to a somewhat barbaric era. The contemporary "courts" that Murdoch paints, however, tend also to reflect a polite civility, but like the Middle Ages, they can serve as an ideal façade to mask the primitive and barbaric impulses of our own age.

This brief look at medieval tradition, however, neglects the poorer element of the social strata because the model for behavior then, as now, was the upper echelon of society, and this was the focus of the art and literature of the period. It is also the focus of Iris Murdoch's novels.

SIR GAWAIN AND THE GREEN KNIGHT REVISITED

Romance is the common thread that links Iris Murdoch's, *The Green Knight*, and the fourteenth century *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. Allusions to the earlier work connect the present to the past, but the connection ultimately serves to discredit romance and the idealistic fantasies it fosters, for according to Iris Murdoch, the unrealistic ideals of romance have no place in contemporary life. In order to bring the reader to this conclusion, Murdoch uses the elements of the medieval romance, the challenge and quests of romantic knights, courtly love, the archaic, the Christian civilized world versus the disordered upheaval, and the cyclical nature of romance to show their total failure in a modern setting. In comparing setting, theme, character and philosophical-religious precepts, one sees both similarities and dissimilarities between the two worlds, for despite using the fourteenth century work as a basis, Murdoch introduces torturous complexities that confuse and demand unraveling, but it is precisely these complexities which bring about a new philosophical approach, an approach which Iris Murdoch sees as better suited to the contemporary age. It is important to note, however, that both works contain a mocking tone that is critical of their respective civilizations. Both seem to see that romance in

any age has an unrealistic, even a comic element that mocks those who would endorse its precepts.

The first important comparison between the medieval and modern work is that of the opening scene. Just as the fourteenth century work begins in the court of King Arthur, so too does Iris Murdoch's work begin in its modern counterpart, the Anderson "court," bringing in the symbolic grail and the archaic element of the fairytale. The opening words of the book bear this out: "Once upon a time there were three little girls...." (1), and by the reference to the girls as "fairytale damsels and grail bearers who live in an enchanted castle wherein `someone from elsewhere'" is needed to break the spell (11-12), or as Murdoch might put it, to challenge the status quo. This "Murdochian court," as mentioned in Chapter II, is a common setting in the Murdoch novel (Conradi 143). It includes an upper-middle class cast of characters who are self-satisfied and secure in their very civilized social, moral and material worlds, and the untouched golden atmosphere and idyllic dwellings of the modern guise are not unlike the earlier ideal court over which King Arthur presided.

The scene of challenge in Murdoch's work, however, is not within this court. Instead it is set under tall trees in "a wild abandoned garden" (85), similar to the primitive

and lawless forest setting that surrounds Bercilak's castle in the earlier work, a setting that, according to Ad. Putter, reflects the mind of the characters, a kind of "limbo" of consciousness where disorder and uncertainty reign (24). This is true also in Murdoch's setting, for Lucas, who is both Gawain's counterpart and the perpetrator of the comparable violent act against the green knight, exhibits a primitive rage that most certainly reflects the wildness and abandonment of the setting. It is a place where the primitive emotions of jealousy and hate defy all civilized behavior.

In Murdoch's work, however, one is presented with numerous "knights" who must prove themselves. Consequently, other salient settings are presented. A second scene of challenge occurs when Harvey, who is included in the enchanted circle of Anderson Court, is dared by Bellamy to walk across the parapet of a bridge somewhere in Italy. The height of the bridge presents a contest of will and agility, for it spans a ravine far below, its height defying the senses and demanding courage. Harvey proves his mettle here and completes the perilous test, not only of ability and bravery, but also one which provides an initiation into adulthood and is reminiscent of the bridge of swords in Chretien de Troyes "Knight of the Cart." It further exemplifies Murdoch's use of medieval material.

A third notable setting is the dingy, cold-water flat of Bellamy, who wishes to prepare himself for life in a religious monastery. Akin to the flat is the monastery itself, sparse and without comfort, a place of solitude and isolation from the world, an isolation which Murdoch finds not only undesirable, but also untenable, for the deprivations undergone in these settings bring about no enlightenment for either of the two men.

At Mir's insistence, the wild garden of the original challenge is revisited and a reenactment is staged. This scene parallels the final forest scene between Bercilak and the green knight, and it is here that Mir demands restitution, a restitution in which Lucas is given a slight cut from the knife hidden within Mir's green umbrella. Mir then suggests a celebration at his opulent home, a counterpart to the medieval castle of Bercilak. In comparison, this is the scene of the final testing. It is in this luxurious setting that the "savior," Mir, graciously entertains the entire entourage of Murdoch's characters, and all there feel they have found the satisfaction and enlightenment which they have sought; however, this setting is protected, an idealistic place, says Murdoch, a place from which she insists they emerge after the fairytale is unveiled and reality revealed. It is finally, the setting in which the savior is debunked, the romance discredited.

represented by King Arthur's court (Putter 23). Similarly, this questioning of values is the main challenge in Murdoch's *The Green Knight*, but in the later work there are related but multiple challenges to consider.

The most important challenge of SGGK occurs in the opening scene of the tale when Arthur's court is suddenly disrupted by the dramatic entrance of the towering, green Bercilak, who defies any knight to destroy him. One can surmise that the comparable scene in the modern work has already occurred when the novel opens, and one must question why Murdoch has taken this pivotal enactment and relegated it to the past. It is possible, however, that the main scene of challenge occurs later when Mir confronts Lucas at Lucas's home. It is also possible that Murdoch intends to blur the outlines of the novel's structure. In examining these possibilities, one need consider the opening scene in the modern work with its characteristic fairytale beginning. This emphasis engenders two hypotheses. First, by using the earlier work in juxtaposition, time is unified, and the past and the present merge, and the exact timing of Murdoch's challenge becomes inconsequential. The unification of time also suggests that man is now what he was then, and the same challenges are accorded to modern humankind. With the supposition that humans' nature and propensities are unchanged over the ages, Murdoch would concur; however, the

attempts to use such romantic tales as SGGK to unearth truths about humankind's existence, Murdoch would see as futile. Second, by seeing the beginning scene of SGGK as a critical key to the work, Murdoch would have us consider the beginning of her novel as pivotal as well. If so, then one must regard her work as a fairytale. Thus the initial challenge presented in Murdoch's work, in essence, steers us toward a different vehicle for extricating the philosophical truths for which humans search. All attempts that use romantic conventions to give characters' lives direction and meaning are doomed to fail. One questions, then, how to champion the civilized over the bestial. Murdoch's answer is to bury self-indulgent romanticisms and forge a selfless path toward the "good."

Although it is not unique to the medieval romance, the disordered world is another of the devices to be compared between SGGK and the contemporary work. Since one enters the novel after the initial challenge and so-called beheading, the Anderson court has already been thrown into chaos. In the earlier work the disorder is mainly concentrated on Gawain's journey to the land of the green knight, and it continues until the resolution attained by the slight wound Bercilak gives Gawain for his acceptance of the green girdle. In Murdoch, the resolution is more complicated in that many characters undergo the uncertainty

and upheaval of their personal worlds before a change is effected, and the resolution dissolves the court of the Andersons rather than incorporating the changed and more insightful Gawain into the existing society of the court seen in SGGK.

The society challenged in Murdoch's work represents the same milieu as that in SGGK. Discounting the obvious modernity, the difference is illuminated by the character of Lucas, Gawain's counterpart. With his impressive intellectual accomplishments, he is one of the more elite members of the upper-middle-class Anderson Court. Yet his very civilized and educated demeanor barely masks the primitive hatred and jealousy that he feels toward his brother, Clement, and it is this hatred that brings about the chaos and disorder of the enchanted world to which Murdoch's characters belong. Murdoch, in essence, challenges the members of the court to prove that their very civilized behavior can withstand the onslaught of the everpresent animal-like behavior Lucas's hatred represents, those instincts that are primitive and unbridled by reason, learning, or training. In this context, Murdoch asks the same question asked by the author of the earlier work: Can the primitive in man ever be fully controlled? In both instances, the answer is no. In SGGK, Gawain takes the girdle, a symbol of weakness and a primitive fear. By

accepting it, Gawain shows the crack in the idyllic civilized and aristocratic way of life of Arthur's court, the crack that says we are still of animal nature, and civilization, even in the best of knights, cannot totally erase this primitive essence. So, too, in Murdoch's work. For neither the upper middle-class upbringing nor the intellectual accomplishments of Lucas dispel the intense rage and jealousy that would cause his attempt on his brother's life. The question--and the challenge--then become: What can modern civilization do to effectively immobilize primitive and uncivilized emotions in humankind? Murderous rage causes chaos and is not permissible in a well-ordered society. Thus it must be tempered.

The character, Bellamy, seems to suggest religion as a possible deterrent to man's baser instincts, but Murdoch rejects this. For Bellamy's pursuit of religion symbolizes the religious quest. He summarily renounces the upper middle-class material comforts and applies for admittance to a monastery. Yet the priest and chosen mentor with whom he corresponds challenges Bellamy's intentions, often indicating that they are romantic and have no place in the austerity of the closed order. But from the priest, Father Damien, we also learn that religion is "too easily degraded into magic" (39), a statement that reflects Murdoch's own views. For the devout and realistic priest leaves the

order, returns to the world, and advises Bellamy to do the same. One surmises, then, that there is no religious solution here for either the devout Christian or for Bellamy, and thus there is no religious solution for any of the characters. Christianity, at best, is nice magic, and Christ is the supreme magician, but his magic will not give moral structure and meaning to modern life.

Neither will the adherence to the Old Testament of the Bible effect more civilized change, for the brothers, Lucas and Clement are referred to as Cain and Abel, and when Clement questions why Lucas would try to murder him, he asks specifically, "Why was it meant to happen?" This is decidedly different than asking, "Why did you try to murder me?" and gives the action a larger meaning, some plan of fate or the gods, perhaps even a monotheistic God. Lucas's answer also deals with a greater meaning, for he states:

> You know perfectly well why. Why did Cain kill Abel? Why did Romulus kill Remus? I have always wanted to kill you, ever since the moment when I learnt of your existence. Do not let us waste time on *that*. (88)

One could then surmise that neither the wisdom of the ancients of legend nor that of pre-Christian Jews acted as deterrents to violence, for there, too, innate and barbaric rage erupted.

Other challenges are represented by the characters of

Moy and Clement. Moy, the fey one, undergoes a sexual initiation into adulthood in an enactment reminiscent of the archaic Leda and the swan legend. Murdoch intends this also as a reminder of the raw sexual drive, of passion uncontrolled and primitive like the the raging hatred of Lucas and that of the hunters who savagely slaughter their prey while Bercilak's wife attempts to seduce Gawain. Although of varying intensity, all of these represent the propensity of humans to forego their civilized codes of behavior. Thus one sees Murdoch using precisely that same test of civilized behavior that the author of SGGK uses. Both see the passion of the primitive in man as a challenge to the idealistic codes that humans devise to counter these same baser instincts. Yet the author of SGGK gives nature its due by making Bercilak a tremendously appealing character. He has vitality and a zest for life that Gawain's more civilized demeanor cannot match, and Gawain pales beside him. Murdoch's modern Gawain fares better, for he is redeemed by love.

There is further challenge in the scene in Mir's home, a counterpart to Bercilak's castle. Here the challenge is to all the characters' belief in Mir as savior, a belief that is ultimately destroyed. For Peter is mentally unstable and a liar. There is no savior here, not even a hero to whom humankind can look for inspiration. The challenge, then,

is: What is man to do in the face of this destruction of religion and this ineptness of civilizing influences? The difference between these two works lies instead in the resolution each author offers to this universal challenge.

Turning then to characterization, one can automatically expect, in the typical romantic tradition, that characters will be archetypal and stylized. In her book *Understanding Iris Murdoch*, Cheryl Bove states that characterization has become the basis of Murdoch's contribution to the development of the novel and the means by which she advances her moral philosophy (4-5); however, while using characters as thematic devices, Murdoch also presents characters as distinct types. The combination thus makes it impossible to examine any character without considering theme and philosophy. Lucas, an archetypal villain, is a prime example of this complexity. When he is compared to his counterpart, Gawain, one sees two entirely different characters. Gawain, the gentle and most courteous of knights, seems to have little resemblance to the vicious and antisocial Lucas. But there is a strong parallel, for each is tested as an elite representative of his time. Lucas, like Gawain, has had an excellent background, steeped in courtesy and honor, and the fact that he is one who essentially belongs to the Anderson Court is a further proof of his worth, just as membership in King Arthur's court was

considered highly prestigious. In addition, Lucas is given impressive academic credentials, an earmark of success in contemporary society. So each has received the benefits and resulting accolades from his respective culture. A strong thematic comparison can also be made in that both represent the historical inability of man to totally subdue the instincts and passions of his nature, Gawain by taking the green girdle as an assurance of survival, and Lucas, by attempting the murder of his brother. Granted, these two acts differ completely in culpability, but the emphasis is on the strength of the animal nature of man.

This animal nature is epitomized in both medieval and modern works by the green knights, Bercilak and Peter Mir. The gloriously virile and robust character of SGGK essentially shows the best nature has to offer, for Bercilak's tests of Gawain exemplify an almost Darwinian battle. Here Gawain must show that the values of his civilization are able to overcome one of the greatest of human temptations, that of sexual drive, and he does show this, but he is then confounded by the instinct for survival to which he succumbs. This is a minor infraction, however, since his punishment is of little consequence--just as Lucas's punishment is minor. Therefore, in Gawain, civilizing influences are effective though not infallible, and it is perhaps comical that we would think otherwise,

which is shown in the humor at the end of SGGK when all knights share in the possession of a green girdle.

Though Murdoch's Peter Mir, like Bercilak, is representative of man's nature, he also serves other roles. First, there are comparisons with the character of the older tale as he tells Lucas, "I have sought for you as for my salvation. I have pursued you because I need you. We are eternally connected" (123). They are connected because one represents man's natural being, the other, what man can make of his nature through civilizing influences. Murdoch, however, seems to give Peter Mir a much broader role than that given to Bercilak, for there are various identities attached to him. One of these is the image of Mir as a predatory beast:

> The figure of Mir, suddenly rising up in the gloom, broad-shouldered, rectangular, seemed uncanny, unnaturally tall....Mir turned to him [Clement] for a moment and Clement gained an impression of his head, suddenly like the head of a large animal, a boar perhaps, or even a buffalo. Then Mir, noticing Clement...smiled, his glinting teeth appearing as out of dark fur. (124)

The words *uncanny, unnaturally tall* are reminiscent of the original green knight whose size was not only enormous but who was a bright shade of green. Mir, too, is always associated with the color green. This passage, however, also brings in the vicious and animalistic boar hunt that

takes place outside of Bercilak's castle while the equally animalistic sexual "hunt" takes place within. Seen as the boar, Mir represents the prey of the medieval work, and therefore, the victim. Thus is Mir associated with the victimized Gawain. And so the waters are muddied--and muddied yet further because the animal in Murdoch's passage seems predatory, and there is an implied evil in the "glinting teeth"--again a reference back to Bercilak. Yet it must also be acknowledged that Bercilak represents a multi-faceted character. He is at once predatory yet virile, challenging yet civil. In him is natural man who displays both primitive passion and natural goodness. Mir's character, however, seems even more diverse, and at times, he takes on a conspiratorial role as when Clement calls them (Lucas and Mir) "two hateful enchanters" (289). In addition, they are called mad magicians, a reference also attributed to Christ (238). A further reference to Mir as Christ occurs when he saves Clement's life at the expense of his own (151) and when he essentially serves as savior to Lucas by bringing about Lucas's metamorphosis.

In looking at these disparate references, the merging of Lucas and Mir seems most significant, for here the pre-Christian God, Christ, the villainous Lucas and savior Mir are one, yet act individually in some absurd yet serious and continuous battle, and there is a sense of

predestination and necessity in their relationship and in the act of the attempted murder itself. This is lent even further credence with the meaning of Mir's name--that of "peace" or "world," a meaning which again directs one to a larger significance (101).

More characterizations must be considered, however, because Murdoch intends us to understand more than that humans simply have this ineradicable and primitive baseness in their nature which creates a constant battle between their civilizing versus their physical propensities. First, if Lucas, like Gawain, is to represent the best modern civilization has to offer, the obvious conclusion is that society is filled with violence and unchecked passions. One could surmise, then, that Murdoch unequivocably condemns modern civilization and maintains that the primitive has won and the disordered world has become the real--not just romance's temporary excursion into chaos. In order to answer this question, one must examine another prominent change made from the earlier work--that of the addition of Clement at the scene of the beheading. This addition is, again, an important deviation from the medieval work. Clement, as Abel to Lucas's Cain, and as a knight, is associated with Lucas--but also with Mir, for all three of them are combined by the reference to magician--and to Christ as magician (41). Within the symbolic context, then,

Clement, too, exists outside the boundaries of time; he, too, is part of the equation. For he is supremely civilized, even to the point of self-denial of his brother's sin against him, a denial in which Mir finds fault and for which he strongly chastises Clement when he fails to acknowledge his brother's act, but this kind of evil is beyond Clement's comprehension. He cannot see that there are two sides of humankind, just as Lucas cannot. When Lucas states that there is no good, and the tendency toward evil is overwhelming, he is wholly and completely blinded to the good of which the very civilized Clement is so representative (72). Clement is blind to the primitive physical force wherein self-survival and satisfaction are primary and where emotions are unbridled. He cannot comprehend these because he truly exhibits the best civilizing influences, the best unbesmirched by the base primitive inheritance against which civilized man must forever battle. Thus together he and Lucas constitute the whole human, and Murdoch's vision sees that it is the whole man with whom society and individuals must deal. This is why Mir is so strongly critical of Clement. One does not rectify evil by ignoring it.

There is also a parallel here between the gentle Gawain and Clement. Both almost quixotically blind themselves to the Mirs, Lucases and Bercilaks, and as a consequence, they

elements of religion, those elements that are a part of one's romantic, self-centered illusions. Second, "the false God punishes, the true God slays." This slaying refers to the myth of Marsyas and Appollo, a myth that Murdoch interprets as the unselfing. For Marsyas's challenge of Apollo results in his being slain by literally having the skin peeled from his body. It is this process that Murdoch relates to her idea of stripping away the self. Third, the advice given to Bellamy is to help others and seek good through loving. This is the only way of salvation that Murdoch sees for modern man.

Thus Murdoch takes one past the tension between nature and civilization that is so much a part of the medieval myth of the green knight, to a point beyond. She, in essence, says that this tension between the primitive physical nature of man and the civilization that would harness it is immutable; one must take another step to find salvation. Mir and Bercilak, the evil Lucas, and civil Clement and Gawain are always with us. They are a part of the scheme of things, perhaps even one created by God himself. Also, salvation does not lie in romantic illusions. Nor does it lie in religion per se, unless this religion embodies the unselfing that Murdoch advocates. Finally, there is love, the path which leads to the unselfing and, finally, to the good, the final goal.

Thus one sees that Murdoch uses the elements of medieval romance for two main purposes: The first is to connect past and present, and by doing so, to point to universal themes about the nature of humankind, themes that emerge in both the modern and the ancient works. The second is to essentially debunk the romance and replace it with her personal philosophy of selflessness and the good, the only philosophy that she feels will work for humankind in these modern times. Both SGGK and Murdoch's work challenge society to work toward that which will benefit it most. In SGGK, this means a merging of the best of natural man with the best of the civilized court. For Murdoch this means forsaking reliance on all past systems and codes of behavior to forge a singular path toward good. Unlike the journey of Sir Gawain in the early work, the journeys of Murdoch's characters contain no places of refuge. There are no romantic ideals on which dreams can be based, there is no Christian God to pray to when danger is imminent, no court of camaraderie to which one can return. The romantic fantasies must be left to immature minds; one must rely on the self and its abnegation, not on magic or on God, and thus the court is disbanded.

A PARALLEL: COURTLY LOVE, MEDIEVAL AND MODERN

In citing the elements of medieval romance in *The Nice and the Good,* one sees Iris Murdoch using the love triangle of Octavian and Kate Gray and John Ducane to evoke the medieval triangle of King Arthur, Guinevere, and Lancelot. For as Conradi mentions, the society set up here in the Grays' home represents one of the Murdochian courts (143), and one can compare the Trescombe House in this novel to the court of Arthur. In the novel the disbanding of Trescombe House results in greater insight and more fulfilling lives for its former inhabitants. The disintegration of Arthur's court, though tragic, can also be said to point to greater insight if one is to consider the Christian values of the day. Murdoch, seeing the fallacies of the medieval romance with its emphasis on courtly love, chooses to give the ending of her enclave an entirely different meaning, one that points the reader toward her moral philosophy rather than toward the Christianity seen in Malory. Within the framework of medieval romance, however, Murdoch is able to interweave past and present, and in this interweaving, use the past as both a base from which to venture forth and as a stricture from which one must free oneself in order to reach a higher plane.

The entire tone of the novel is set at the beginning of the tale by a mysterious suicide, a death that has at its

heart pagan and Satanic rites whose supernatural underpinnings cast a somewhat sinister pall over the novel. It is this death that introduces the chaos and disordered world in which the romance flourishes. This type of occurrence is a predictable element of Murdoch's novels, for she casts her characters into the melee' in order that they be taught the lessons she wishes them to learn. Thus the enigmatic circumstances of the death provide the discomfiting undercurrents of the gothic novel's world and, indeed, provide the event that throws the characters into that disordered and chaotic realm through which they must journey in order to find some truth, to purify themselves, to learn a life lesson.

One escapes this disordered world, however, in the idyllic, upper middle-class setting of Trescombe. Here Kate and Octavian rule in oblivious ease in a getaway by the sea. It is here that the main triangle of Kate, Octavian and John operates, and just as King Arthur is aware of the Lancelot-Guinevere love, so too is Octavian aware of the liaison of Kate and John. For Kate is entirely open with Octavian and apprises him of the details of her feelings and her actions with John, actions which have thus far not led to any sexual consummation and so are relatively innocent. Despite the seeming innocence of the liaison, however, one still cannot escape the unease planted by the mysterious

in total opposition to the medieval courtly love tradition with its emphasis on one love requiring obsession with and obedience to the lover. One might note, however, that the shifting of sexual images occurs as an underlying stream of consciousness wherein the mind constantly takes in stimuli and shifts and alters its thoughts. Nonetheless, this continual interplay tends to lessen the importance of the liaisons. For Murdoch seems to be saying that sexual love is, essentially, not all that significant in itself. But she says more than this, as Cheryl Bove argues in her essay "New Directions: Iris Murdoch's Latest Women": Murdoch does not recognize gender distinctions and insists that those who are on a higher level are androgynous (Tucker 188). Further, Murdoch feels that gender differences simply cease to exist on a spiritual level (qtd. in Tucker 190). Thus the shifting of the various sexual attachments seems to diminish the importance of romantic, sexual love rather than glorifying or idealizing it as does the courtly love code. Minimizing the importance of romantic sexual love does not, however, excuse the dallying between Kate and John, for this is mere self-centered folly, and like the Guinevere and Lancelot liaison, potentially destructive for society.

It is not only Murdoch who criticizes the highly charged sexual attraction, however; it is also criticized by Chaucer, Jean de Meun, and by Chretien de Troyes. They,

like Murdoch, would eschew it for its lack of meaning, its mindless and unreasoning obsession and its emphasis on the gratification of self. In earlier scenes of *Troilus and Criseyde* when Troilus crassly offers to pander his sister in order that he may have physical possession of Criseyde, one detects Chaucer's intended censure. In this early scene, the emphasis is again on pure physical lust. In the *Romance of the Rose* Jean de Meun reduces the obsession of love to mere physical, vulgar satiation when the lover finally consummates his love with the rose, and in *The Knight of the Cart* Chretien makes a mockery of the obsessive and tainted romance between Lancelot and Guinevere. Also, after Troilus's death in the final scenes of *Troilus and Criseyde*, Troilus sees the utter insignificance even of such strong romantic love as his when opposed to the spiritual realization of Christian love. There is one important difference here between Murdoch and the medieval authors, however, because her conception of a high plane of love excludes Christianity. Nonetheless, Murdoch's recognition of the relative insignificance of romantic love parallels these medieval authors. So, too, there is a parallel in thinking that human sexual love can provide a basis for the development of a greater love, that which takes humans beyond the realm of mere romance. Thus the many parallels drawn cause the continual change of focus from present to

past.

As Dipple states, the past is very much a theme in *The Nice and the Good* (164). This is true in several senses. As shown in Chapter III on *The Green Knight*, the past adds another dimension to Murdoch's work and is intended to give a timelessness to the actions and the philosophy she espouses. By using elements of medieval and other romance literature, she wants the reader to realize that these romantic inclinations and ideals are part of the human condition, and humankind will always set up quests for meaning. These are part of an eternal human drama, begun in the innocence of childhood, taken through initiation into adulthood and beyond into what is often a chaotic and disordered world to finally reach some kind of reckoning, a reckoning with oneself, with one's beliefs and philosophy, with one's God. Murdoch shows all of these because she sees them as never-ending. They are the stuff of life, the stuff with which all humans must deal whether in medieval romance or in contemporary society--and it is because of this never-ending drama that Murdoch uses elements of medieval romance to structure her works. So, too, in Malory as the final days of Guinevere and Lancelot force them to re-examine the code of courtly love, which sanctioned their adulterous relationship, and to reckon the terrible destruction of Camelot that it brought about. At that time

they, too, turned to their God, to Christianity as a more lasting and viable alternative to a code which served only to ratify humans' desires within a social realm. In *The Nice and the Good* the drama is repeated as the theme of the past plays itself out in the lives of the individual characters who are bound by it and must find some way to escape its bonds, for it both limits and paralyzes those caught in its grasp just as the courtly love code did with both its limitations and escape from deeper considerations of religious belief.

It is this constant preoccupation with the past and how it interacts with the present that Murdoch uses to exemplify her points. At Trescombe life seems frozen in an ideal world where one need do nothing but exist, and this is precisely what the characters are doing, merely existing, haunted by pasts that will keep them in their present state. Trescombe, like Camelot, represents the idyllic world that one carries in one's mind, merely another Camelot being replayed in the twentieth century, but to accept this idyllic world--at any time--results in a stasis of character that is condemning one to mere dreams, mere romance.

In moving from the romantic world to the realistic, however, one must examine the characters on an individual level and look at the forces that paralyze them. First there is Willy, whose horrifying experiences in Dachau keep

him from living a life in the present. Second is Paula, who cannot escape the vision of the brutal moments, which led to her divorce. Mary Clothier, too, is enclosed in the confining memory of her husband's death, and Theo has abandoned his spiritual quest, allowing it to be frozen by the moments of lust he experienced in a Buddhist monastery. Even Ducane is tied to a past sexual liaison, one that he wishes to end but cannot without the wounding of another. For all of these there is a common thread, however, a violent moment that has shown that no amount of civilization can subdue the primitive and raw passions of man's physical nature despite the highly civilized life one leads. Even for Mary, who has no personal culpability, there is the finality of a physical end, which no civilizing influence can mitigate. Thus the eruption of these primitive, physical elements in humankind must be dealt with in order for one to see clearly and go forward. Just as Lucas in *The Green Knight* had to undergo some event that would free him from his violent jealousy toward his brother, so too must the characters here bring this element of their pasts to some final point, some resolution that will free them. To remain in stasis, as they are doing in Trescombe, is to be caught in the past. What Murdoch seems to imply, then, is that a human being must be tied neither to the failings of his physical nature nor to the idealism that romance

represents. These are reiterated themes in Murdoch's work because they are part of the inheritance of mankind. The physical base, the unbridled force of emotions and passions that are unleashed in even the highly civilized groups with which Murdoch deals, can never be totally subdued. They are simply there for humankind to manage just as Gawain in SGGK must manage them and Lucas must manage them in *The Green Knight,* Murdoch's parallel work. The romantic idealism, too, is a constant, for humankind must have its dreams. These, too, will never be erased, but must be managed and seen in their proper perspective, another of the premises already introduced in the chapter on *The Green Knight*.

One cannot go further, however, without attention to John Ducane, who serves as the Lancelot counterpart and as a catalyst for all action. He sees himself as a good man, or at least as one who attempts to be good. He is father-confessor to the other characters--though he often fails in this role; he is set up as judge and dispenser of justice in the suicide case, a role which he later abjures; and finally, he is simply a knight in quest of goodness. He is not, however, the "good" referred to in the title of the work, but he is recognized as one of the best of his civilization--just as Lancelot was. He also undergoes the dire trial that ultimately gives insight and direction to his life and to the lives of others, but as a result of this

trial, he breaks his tie with Kate. This would be in total opposition to the courtly love code, which dictates that the lover never forsake the beloved. But this is not the past, says Murdoch, and one must find a new code to define goodness and honor, one which is relevant for a new era. John Ducane, then, is a new Lancelot, and he forsakes the courtly love code. Just like the original Lancelot, however, his actions are responsible for the breakup of fellowship, but each dissolution results from a different cause. Lancelot's adherence to the courtly love code is in opposition to the code of chivalry and fellowship that marked the medieval period, and this adherence proves disastrous for Camelot because it brings down the high ideals of civil behavior that chivalry represented and leads to the inexorable tragedy of its destruction. In forsaking the courtly love code, John Ducane, in essence, brings about the breakup of this modern-day court. For Trescombe, however, the breakup is essential to the birth of a code more pertinent, more applicable than that of the chivalry and courtly love, which Camelot came to epitomize. The values of courtly love and the chivalric code did not save the court of Camelot, and they will not save the modern-day counterpart. These values, at best, are outdated; they are no longer viable, and the need for an alternative becomes clear to Ducane when he undergoes the life-threatening

ordeal in Gunnar's Cave, an ordeal that mimics the challenge exhibited in the medieval romance. For the medieval court, one could argue that the return to the deeper religious values of Christianity should supplant the more superficial value of courtly love—and even that of chivalry. For Murdoch, however, characters must embrace what she would call the unselfing:

> He thought, if I ever get out of here I will be no man's judge. Nothing is worth doing except to kill the little rat [his former self], not to judge, not to be superior, not to exercise power, not to seek, seek, seek. To love and to reconcile and to forgive, only this matters. All power is sin and all law is frailty. Love is the only justice. Forgiveness, reconciliation, not law. (315)

This statement is made toward the end of the ordeal when Ducane and Pierce are hanging on to life, getting warmth from the dog and each other to keep their body heat from plummeting. When they are finally out of the cave again, one sees Ducane as both literally and symbolically naked. The sea has purged him of the trappings of civilization and of his former self so that he is ready for renewal and ready to assist others in this task. In essence, he has undergone the equivalent of Christianity's rite of baptism.

The other characters then proceed to free themselves of the past. Part of this process is forgiving themselves for

their uncivilized transgressions: Willy for his betrayal of fellow prisoners in Dachau, Paula and Richard for the passion that flared into brutal injury, and Theo for indulging in a selfish eroticism that resulted in death. Mary, too, must come to terms with the reality of death as a physical part of life and a part of the past that must be put to rest. Once these actions are accomplished, Trescombe Court is largely disbanded, its characters free to begin the process of renewal by love, a renewal in which Ducane has played some part. Most of the characters, then, pair off, as is usual in the denouement of a Murdoch novel.

In terms of the mystical goodness that Murdoch's characters pursue, however, it is not necessarily those who undergo an epiphany that are singled out for elevation, and in this novel, it is not John Ducane who comes close to achieving it. It is instead Mary and the curmudgeon, Theo, who come closest to the goal. Deborah Johnson comments that Mary's thoughts on her womanly plight as nurturer and yet passionate woman are glib and tend to "the level of magazine cliche'" (57). But as Johnson says further, "Mary's self-belittling and detached comment on her 'woman's nature'" (57) is endorsed by Murdoch, as indeed it would be considering the kind of human being Murdoch most admires. For Mary is selfless; she essentially runs the household and tends to everyone yet asks little for herself. This comes

close to the ideal as far as Murdoch is concerned. There is even a point when she is waiting for the outcome of the Gunnar's Cave episode when she reaches the height of moral striving:

> One is oneself this piece of earth, this concoction of frailty, a momentary shadow upon the chaos of the accidental world. Since death and chance are the material of all there is, if love is to be love of something it must be love of death and change. This changed love moves upon the ocean of accident, over the forms of the dead, a love so impersonal and so cold it can scarcely be recognized, a love devoid of beauty, of which one knows no more than the name, so little is it like an experience. This love Mary felt now for her dead husband and for the faceless wraith of her perhaps drowned son. (317-318)

These are words that show the almost impossible selfless love for which human beings must strive. It is impersonal and almost beyond the pale of earthly existence, yet this is what Murdoch deems as the ultimate of human experience. This is not an experience that the hedonistic Kate could ever understand let alone embrace, and so the Arthurian triangle of Kate, Octavian and John has been left behind in this new and demanding code of behavior. Murdoch uses the medieval trappings of courtly love and chivalry, but she rejects them. They are useless for this modern, contingent world of chance. These romantic appurtenances have not the substance to transform our world. They are composed of childish ideals, personal love that dwells on self and the

self's desires. They have no place in the cosmic blankness that Murdoch envisions. As Dipple notes, "The breaking of the personality comes not from defeat, guilt or evil, but from the clear light of good" (13). Theo reiterates this statement when he says, "The point is that nothing matters except loving what is good.... Only this contemplation breaks the tyranny of the past...breaks in the end, the personality itself" (355-356). Dipple states, "He [Theo] knows that the breaking of the personality come not from the curse of defeat, guilt or evil, but from the clear light of the good" (13), and the breaking of the past's tyranny is a central theme. When it is accomplished, the characters are free, leaving behind romantic imaginings and the stultifying paralysis of Trescombe Court.

It is only Theo, however, who is able to sustain the selflessness that Murdoch asks of human beings, for it is he who is willing finally to go back to the Buddhist temple even without the solace that forgiveness and reconciliation would give. He will go back with the vision of a good that terrifies his soul:

> Theo had begun to glimpse the distance that separates the nice from the good, and the vision of this gap had terrified his soul. He had seen, far off, what is perhaps the most dreadful thing in the world, the other face of love, its blank face. Everything that he was, even the best that he was, was connected with possessive self-filling human love. That blank demand implied the death

of his whole being. (359-360)

It is with this vision that Theo decided to go back to the monastery, not because he can achieve that blank face of love and make it a part of himself, but simply because he will then be in a place where he can observe it and know that it does, truly, exist. The return is without reward, but to go back, is the final accomplishment--the unselfing.

THE CHALLENGED AND THE CHALLENGERS

One of the important elements of medieval romance involves a challenge to prove worthiness. This challenge may be targeted at an individual who must distinguish himself or herself in some way or find some philosophical or religious truth that enriches life, but the challenge also may provide a test of a system of belief that pertains to society as a whole. One sees both individual and societal challenges in Chapter III, which examined challenges both to Sir Gawain and to the court of Arthur and their equivalent counterparts in Murdoch's *The Green Knight*. In Malory, the final passages again involve both individuals and a challenge to the way of life represented by King Arthur's court. Similarly, in *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*, Murdoch challenges both individuals and the society in which these individuals thrive. *The Unicorn*, however, is more all-encompassing in its assessment, not only of individual quests and fulfillment, but of philosophical and religious systems.

The gauntlet thrown by Iris Murdoch is a challenge to modern man to create a society that has its basis in a humanistic goodness. This challenge is mainly presented to the upper-middle class faction, who have a solid and enviable position in society, both socially and economically. Because they reap the benefits their social stratum affords, Murdoch would have them examine both the

ills society suffers and the means to redress them, an examination that leads them into a quest for meaning and finally to aspiration of what Murdoch terms the "good." Thus the challenge becomes that which will overcome evil, and the challenger a representative of that evil. One sees these facets in both *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* and in *The Unicorn*. Each of these shows a different kind of challenge, a different facet of evil or unworthiness to be surmounted. Both present an almost allegorical rendering of the fight between the forces of good and evil represented by specific characters, but in *A Fairly Honourable Defeat* the confrontation takes place within a realistic modern setting, taking to task those subtle and insidious evils that plague the modern society. *The Unicorn*, however, is a closed, Gothic novel whose action is set apart within a fabled and disordered world in which the evil operates as part of established philosophical and religious systems that are the heritage of contemporary civilization. In each instance, however, there is a central purveyor of evil whose influence the characters must overcome in order to move toward goodness and one who acts as the adversary to him.

As is typical, both in the medieval romance and in Murdochian fiction, one is presented with a "court" in both of these works. In FHD, the court again reflects the educated and financially stable citizens of society, its

relatively common and privileged class, but an entirely different scene is presented in *The Unicorn*. Here the reader is taken immediately into the fantasy world of Gaze castle, a remote and mysterious place abounding in strange and sinister characters like those in the typical mystery novel or fairytale, and the court at Gaze has the formal and prescribed formula of the disordered world seen in medieval romance. Nonetheless, in both of the novels, one enters after the challenge has been initiated.

In FHD, Julius King is the challenger, the antagonist to whom we are introduced in the first words of the novel. It is essentially he who throws the placid and self-important world of the characters into the chaos and disorder so typical of the romance, and in cyclical fashion, the novel also ends with Julius, thus framing and asserting his importance. He is a debonair and viciously subtle devil, cynical yet sympathetic, for he fits quite well into the milieu of the upper-middle class that Murdoch chooses to challenge. His person is meticulously clothed, and his apartment fastidious and decorated with the expensive accessories that this level of society deems appropriate. He is, in essence, a verifiable member of the "court." Yet his former employment points to the malevolence of his character, for he had been working on the development of biological warfare, a fact that is like a blazoning headline

announcing: this character is evil. Rupert, however, in the true tolerant fashion and blase' attitude of this milieu, defends Julius's work on the scientific basis that one "[has] to investigate the stuff in order to find the antidote" (4), but Hilda counters it, "I hate that old argument. All evil lives on it" (4), a seeming echo of Murdoch's own view. That Julius is evil, however, is not readily discernible, for it is not until the last of the novel that Julius begins to cruelly manipulate the affections of Rupert and Morgan, a manipulation that Julius considers a joke. It is not until his deception causes devastating consequences, that one fully recognizes the magnitude of his malevolence. This is because the evil is built upon many minor incidents--the pitiless psychological manipulation of Simon, the caustic but sly comments about Rupert's intellectual inadequacies, and the theft of letters from Hilda's desk, a theft that is perpetrated while Julius is taking full advantage of the Grays' generous hospitality. One certainly recognizes these incidents as meanness, but true evil takes more: the venomous and destructive joke that ends in Rupert's death. Nonetheless, because of Julius' socially desirable façade, even Hilda, one of the best of the characters, accepts him as a suitable partner for her sister, Morgan. For at one point she says, "Oh Morgan. I do wish it could have been all right. Julius is so much

more the kind of person..." (53), and the reader infers the rest. In other words, Julius fits, and the fact that he does is a devastating comment on Murdoch's view of this social strata. The devil fits, but Christ does not.

The character of Julius, however, is an age-old one, for he is a destroyer. His insidious tricks are reminiscent of Meleagant in Chretien de Troyes' *The Knight of the Cart*, who spirits Guinevere away to his castle—much as Julius spirits away Hilda's sister, Morgan, to America. He has no love for Morgan, it is simply a destructive tactic which will destroy Morgan's marriage to Tallis and gnaw away at one of society's institutions. It is also a blow to the sainted Tallis, who is Julius's opposing force.

It is Julius, of course, who wins the battle of evil over good and Tallis Browne who suffers the "fairly honourable defeat" reflected in the title of the work. This interpretation is given weight by Cheryl Bove in *Understanding Iris Murdoch*, who states that FHD "concerns the struggle between good and evil which takes place in everyday life. In an alternate allegorical reading of the novel endorsed by Murdoch herself, this struggle also involves spiritual beings" (67). These spiritual beings are Julius King, the existential Satan, and Tallis Browne, who represents the Christ-like good. Peter Conradi offers further evidence for viewing Tallis as a Christ figure when

he notes that Murdoch originally had designated Tallis's birth for December 25th (162). Also, these designations become particularly apparent at the end of the novel in the conversation between the two in which their "awareness of one another as supernatural beings [is shown]" (Conradi 181):

> "Yes, well, I must be going," said Julius. "Good-bye. I suppose in the nature of things we shall meet again." He still lingered. "You concede that I am an instrument of justice?" Tallis smiled. (420)

This gives further credence to the Satan versus Christ analogy, and the extension of the symbolism then requires that Tallis's father, Leonard, must be viewed as God the Father, who proclaims that "All has gone wrong from the first" (67). Leonard is portrayed as a cynical and harsh critic--of life in general and of Tallis. Part of his vindictive verbal barrage is somewhat comic, but like many of Julius's comments, it also exhibits an undercurrent of cruelty. Cruelty reaches its pinnacle, however, when it is initiated and promoted by Julius in the malicious joke that is central to the novel, a joke that provides the denouement and the "fairly honourable defeat." Here evil rules supreme, for the consequences of the joke are the disbanding of the court and the resulting pain of betrayal and death. The results also support Julius's lack of faith in humankind

and, ultimately, the novel's claim that evil will prevail. Nonetheless, Julius is accepted as one of the genteel circle that Rupert and Hilda oversee, and Tallis is not. In Julius's acceptance within the modern court's circle, he resembles Thomas Malory's Mordred, another destroyer whose assault upon the social fabric came from within the approved circle of knights. Both are supreme destroyers, fully inculcated within the very societies they would abolish. Despite the destruction, however, in both cases a corresponding good emerges as the result of the evil. From the standpoint of medieval Christianity, there is a victory in the downfall of Camelot, for there is a blow to the adulterous code of courtly love, and the sinners, Guinevere and Lancelot, turn again to religion. In Murdoch, too, there is victory in the defeat of the modern-day court, a court that glorifies materialism and self-centered behavior. Its downfall is necessary so that the new good of selflessness, which Murdoch endorses, can arise from its ashes.

There is another facet of Julius, however, that of the rather intellectual existential hero, he who has total freedom. To Murdoch, however, freedom is essentially an ambiguous term, for she argues that "Sartre offers no analysis of the `world of ordinary moral virtues.'" (qtd. in Slaymaker 20). Instead he presents a Promethean and

romantic view of freedom, and his position lacks an understanding of the complexity and uniqueness of humans and their interactions. Julius, too, is guilty of reducing human behavior to generalities when he proclaims:

> Human beings are roughly constructed entities, full of indeterminancies and vaguenesses and empty spaces. Driven along by their own private needs they latch blindly onto each other, then pull away, then clutch again. Their little sadisms and their little masochisms are surface phenomena. Anyone will do to play the roles....Human beings are essentially finders of substitutes. (225)

Murdoch's philosophy contradicts this reduction of human motives and the supremacy of human freedom. Yet the pronouncements that Julius makes here do not necessarily offend the intellectual sensibilities of this social circle. In theory, perhaps they do, but the promotion of the joke has adultery as its base, and adultery is not a particularly censured activity. Thus Julius's corrosive evil can easily go undetected, as easily as Julius himself can remain acceptable. He is not acceptable to Murdoch, however, for what she sees as the requirement for humanity is a renewed sense of the difficulty and complexity of the moral life and the opacity of persons (Slaymaker 20-21). To her, freedom is only achieved when one serves the "good," a good that is essentially a necessity, and one that requires an attention that borders on obedience rather than the random unimpeded

action of the existential hero (Slaymaker 21).

Thus Murdoch's Satan also resembles the existentialist, the intellectual and remote being, cynical and urbane--and very much a self-concerned being who both suffers and, in accordance with the Greek Ate', contemptuously wishes to pass that suffering on to others. In this portrait of Julius, however, there remains a shred of sympathy, for though one is aware of his cruel disregard for the pain he initiates, Murdoch would not totally bar him from human pity for the pain he has suffered. One realizes this when one learns that there is the mark of a concentration camp on his arm, a mark that universally denotes suffering, for there was no greater pain than that unleashed upon the victims of the holocaust. Thus Murdoch gives a rationale for his suffering that mitigates our condemnation of him. In some sense, it also mitigates the power of evil since Julius serves as its representative.

One can easily see why Tallis, the representative of good, is not accepted, for he is a self-effacing individual who has none of the trappings of the "court." He lives in what can essentially be viewed as squalor. His home is hopelessly littered with empty milk bottles and dirty dishware, and vermin of all sorts creep and crawl through the accumulated rubbish. It is hardly a view of the upper-middle class dwelling, and though one is sympathetic

to Tallis as a good character, one cannot help but cringe at the circumstances in which he lives. Yet he is the Christ figure. Tallis, however, has no inner life, no conception of self, perhaps as Christ did not in His total allegiance and subordination to God the Father; Tallis is uncomplicated, open, and "has no myth" whereas Julius is mythical (52). In Murdoch's terms this is a supreme compliment, for it is Tallis's very selflessness, his humility and altruism, the contingency of his life that seem to insure his "terrible air of suffering" (112). One does not classify Tallis, for he seems to lack substance and belongs in no social category. Rather, he exemplifies the Murdoch view quoted in Bove's conclusion to *Understanding Iris Murdoch:* `The message is--everything is contingent. There are no deep foundations. Our life rests on chaos and rubble, and all we can try to do is be good' (qtd. in Bove 194). And Tallis does try, and his existence most certainly is grounded in chaos and rubble. In this rubble Tallis is a direct contrast to the "court," his everyday living a direct contrast to the lifestyle of the well-to-do Rupert, Hilda, Simon, Axel and, most of all, to Julius, whose well-ordered life is urbane and destructive. Good comes from the rubble, not from the materialistic and superficial accoutrements of hedonists, no matter how well-meaning. This is a materialistic and well-ordered world where evil finds its

place; this is where Julius can easily maneuver the characters into unseemly and hurtful actions because of their self-centeredness and vanity. It can be compared to the well-ordered Camelot in which Mordred strove to gain ascendancy. He, too, maneuvered others in order to bring about the downfall of the reigning social order. Both Mordred and Julius advocate chaos for their own purposes. Tallis, however, cannot be manipulated because Tallis has no pride, no self. In a comic scene, Tallis piles Morgan's belongings into a wheelbarrow and proceeds to walk across town to deliver them. From a human point of view one sees the complete absurdity of this action, yet the scene follows the wounding of his palm, creating a Christ-like imagery. Thus, though he reflects a total lack of regard for appearances, his very absurdity attests to his goodness.

In addition to these metaphysical archetypes, however, Iris Murdoch employs the Greek concept of Ate', which involves the passing on of one's suffering to another. The concept is more directly shown in *The Unicorn;* however, it also applies to Julius and Tallis. One does not come to this realization until the last discourse between Tallis and Julius when further facts of their lives are revealed. It is then that Tallis discovers the telltale mark of the concentration camp on Julius's arm, and Julius is told that Tallis's sister, rather than dying from an illness as Tallis

has led everyone to believe, in fact, was raped and killed by a sex maniac. Tallis witholds this information because doing so contains the horrifying evil of the situation so that it affects no one but himself. Not so with Julius. On a literal level, one can perhaps excuse Julius's cruelty because of his suffering in the holocaust; however, the suffering and evil that the holocaust represents is passed on by Julius in his malignity toward humankind, his almost brutal disregard for the pain of others. Thus he fulfills the concept of Ate' because his continued participation in evil serves to perpetuate the suffering. Tallis, too, fulfills it by showing its other face--that which takes the suffering unto itself so that its cycle will end.

Like *A Fairly Honourable Defeat, The Unicorn* is also an allegory of good versus evil, but it has a more ambiguous outcome. It is here that Murdoch examines essentially three philosophical-religious systems, challenging each as a viable solution to modern man's search for meaning. First, there is Christianity which is interwoven into a fairytale fantasy and the courtly aspect of medievalism. Second are the philosophical elements of Platonism and Ate', and third is Murdoch's own philosophical ideology of selflessness, which has been discussed previously and falls within the category of realistic modernism. Robert Scholes in his book, *The Fabulators,* describes "these three matrices":

Marian and Effingham = modern "self-development"
The Gaze household = feudal Christianity
The Riders household = classical Platonism (118).

One can include the modern "self-development" as a philosophy because it is essentially Murdoch's system of belief. The fairytale also should be considered here, for it is this element that further defines Murdoch's philosophical position.

The Gothic world of *The Unicorn*, immediately evokes the disordered world of the medieval romance with its mysterious and chaotic landscapes in which characters are tested for spiritual and physical courage and must fulfill some goal or find a meaning that has proved elusive. This medievalism, however, is necessarily interwoven with the Christianity that dominated the Middle Ages. Within this atmosphere characters play out a macabre scenario, a prescribed pattern into which the outsiders, Marian and Effingham are cast. These two provide the element of modern realism and its attendant self-development. Effingham, however, proves lacking in Murdoch's scheme, for he goes through the same trials as the medieval knight underwent before him, but he remains unchanged by his experience. Nonetheless, it remains for realism to prove its mettle and successfully challenge the philosophical-religious components of the other two as well as the inherent romance. Within this

framework, one again sees evil as a challenger, evidenced in the character of Scottow and emanating from the absent Peter Crean-Smith; however, evil here is within the context of fable and Christian belief and is set apart rather than being an integral part of the worldly existence seen in FHD. It is a part of Gaze castle, but Gaze castle is fable. Thus the action works only within the confines of symbolism.

At the onset of the novel, it is immediately apparent that the trappings of contemporary civilization have been left behind, for the modern Marian is cast squarely into the uncivilized moors of Ireland where ancient dolmen rock formations spawn carnivorous plants, and colorful algae exist in close proximity to the "killing sea," an area that is reminiscent of the wild and chaotic settings and unearthly aura described in medieval romance. It is here that Marian's final destination, Gaze castle, is located, and with her arrival, the fairytale is begun, and Marian becomes one of the challenged as well as a challenger to Scottow. The sense of foreboding that attends the reader throughout is mainly due to the information that Marian's arrival coincides with the seventh anniversary of Hannah's captivity and its ensuing expectation that *now* something will happen. The villagers, in fact, some of whom are believed to be descendants of the fairies, think that if Hannah leaves Gaze castle she will die. Denis, however,

tells Marian, "Yes. But nothing is going to happen." Marian responds by saying, "Something has happened. I have come." Marian then experiences a flash of insight:

> A prophetic flash of understanding burnt her with a terrible warmth. That was what she was for; she was for Gerald Scottow: his adversary, his opposite angel. By wrestling with Scottow she would make her way into the story. (65)

Within this context, then, Marian becomes both one of the questing, challenged knights as well as a challenger--and a participant in the fairytale. Effingham, too, is cast in the mode of challenged and challenger for he becomes, in essence, the prince of the tale. For the seven year period is correlated to the fairytale, "Sleeping Beauty," wherein a young princess is cast into a seven-year spell at the end of which the handsome prince comes to rescue her. Thus the medieval romance intertwines with the fantasy of fairytale with Hannah, its reigning princess.

In observing the character of Hannah, however, one sees that she is not the innocent princess of legend. This is a modern fairytale, and Hannah has committed both adultery and violence. Her captivity is, in fact, due to these. Hannah is also narcissistic, for she is often preoccupied with gazing at herself in the mirror, an action which is antithetic to the selflessness Murdoch proposes. Also, she revels in the adulation others give her while she remains

essentially passive. Nonetheless, Hannah represents the "good" among the fairytale characters because she suffers, a suffering which dubiously bestows the title of unicorn upon her. In medieval terms, the unicorn was thought to represent a Christ figure, so her role here also becomes religious, and her suffering is meant to parallel that of Christ's. Scholes, however, sees her position as ambiguous (124), for despite the suffering and the connotations of Christ, Hannah is an adulteress and murderess. Scholes further suggests that "if Marian is a modern 'realist,' Hannah is a medieval one. Hannah accepts the reality of universals, the priority of mind over matter" (119). This acceptance frees her from the necessity to act and grants her the freedom of passivity, a passivity that Murdoch deplores. Hannah does not have to act because she sees herself as part of the preordained pattern. Also, this is not a medieval work. Gaze castle is old and musty like a remnant of medieval tapestry, faded, the actions of its knights and ladies frozen in time, its codes of honor and Christianity mute and paralyzed. Thus, despite the obvious Christian symbolism of the unicorn, Hannah is not simply a Christ figure like Tallis. Her very name, Crean-Smith, which Scholes suggests is an anagram for Christ-name or Christ mean, is made somewhat duplicitous by Hannah, a name which reads the same both backward and forward (Scholes

124). But it is ambiguous, too, because she is both guilty and ordinary. The point at which Max mentions her as the unicorn is followed by a question from Effingham as to whether Max considers her as such, but Max does not commit himself and counters that she may be just the opposite, "a sort of enchantress, a Circe, a spiritual Penelope keeping her suitors spellbound and enslaved'" (qtd. in Scholes 125). In this context, she wields power, a common theme in the novel. Is this power, then, somewhat a source of satisfaction for Hannah? It would seem so when she states in Chapter 27 that she has been playing God but is really nothing but a legend:

> It was your belief in the significance of my suffering that kept me going. Ah, how much I needed you all! I have battened upon you like a secret vampire....I needed my audience, I lived in your gaze like a false God. But it is the punishment of a false God to become unreal. I have become unreal. You have made me unreal by thinking about me so much. You made me an object of contemplation. Just like this landscape. I have made it unreal by endlessly looking at it. (Scholes 130-1)

Hannah is unreal because she has been placed within the framework of Christianity, the confines of fable, and the contemplation of philosophy, and none of these are real in Murdoch's eyes. Only action can finally substantiate one's existence and give it a rationale. Hannah gazes. She bathes in the light of her worshipers, of those who court

her and love her. She is nothing but the mirror she so frequently uses, a reflection of others' feelings. Her character, then, is in direct opposition to the "good" character such as Tallis in FHD who holds no power over others and yet acts decisively to accomplish good whenever possible. Hannah does, however, suffer. Baldanza notes that the reader sees the reason for Hannah's imprisonment as the transfiguration or resignation by spiritual suffering (109). In this sense there is a Christian rationale, for to suffer in Christian terms is to be ennobled and to become Christ-like, but it is, nonetheless, also submission, a submission to which the characters of Gaze adhere, a submission to a divine plan. Scottow mentions this plan when he addresses Marian, chiding her for the failed attempt to set Hannah free, responding to her exclamation that keeping Hannah shut up can't be right:

> Young people think life should be happy and free. But life is never really happy and free in any beautiful sense. Happiness is a weak and paltry thing and perhaps `freedom' has no meaning. There are great patterns in which we are all involved, and destinies which belong to us and which we love even in the moment when they destroy us....the pattern...is what has authority here, and absolute authority...and what you must submit to, my Marian, if you are to stay here. (151)

Scottow then seals his pronouncements to Marian with an erotic kiss to which "her appalled heart, her appalled body,

submitted utterly" (152). Scottow, of course, represents the evil challenger who is himself part of the pattern because evil is part of the pattern. Yet the theatrics of Gaze are a fairytale. Murdoch is essentially saying that the fairytale and Christianity are interwoven. Both are fable, both are unreal, and neither is capable of bringing modern humans to any sort of meaningful existence. Romantic fairytales are nothing more than consolation, and Christianity is a stultified, inactive religion that cannot save modern man. Christianity, therefore, is nothing but a palliative without substance, a religion to be left within the confines of medievalism: a mere medieval romance.

What then of the philosophical Platonism of Riders? Max, its main proponent, merely observes the actions of Gaze from afar. Baldanza reminds us "how remote from the real texture of suffering is Max's bodiless theorizing" (110). There seems to be no possibility of reconciling these two systems to each other, just as the attempts of Pip, Max's progeny, to bring about a union between himself and Hannah result in nothing but failure. The two systems, therefore, seem incompatible. There is no joining of Platonism and Christianity, yet at Hannah's death, the symbolic bequest of Gaze to Max seems to bow to the influence that Platonism has on Christianity, but the bequest also can be seen as an indication that Platonism, too, is mute and ineffective in a

modern world. Certainly it exerted no positive action here; however, the bequest may also indicate that it is in the realm of philosophy that answers must be found. This realm is, indeed, where Murdoch would find them.

The reader is, therefore, left with the modern equivalent of the gallant knight and Maid Marian, both seemingly goodhearted but ineffectual contemporary beings. Effingham, as the courtly lover of Hannah, has the usual philosophic revelation in a near-death experience, one that so many of Murdoch's other knights have undergone. At this point he is lost in the bog and sinking in quicksand:

> Something had been withdrawn, had slipped away from him in the moment of his attention and that something was simply himself. Perhaps he was dead already, the darkening image of the self forever removed. Yet what was left....It came to him [that] ....what was left was everything else, all that was not himself....And indeed he could always have known this for the fact of death stretches the length of life. Since he was mortal he was nothing and since he was nothing all that was not himself was filled to the brim with being and it was from this that the light streamed. This then was love, to look and look until one exists no more, *this* was the love which was the same as death. He looked, and knew with a clarity which was one with the increasing light, that with the death of the self the world becomes quite automatically the object of a perfect love. (167)

Like its counterpart in Gunnar's Cave in NG, this vision of philosophical purity seems to affect the characters deeply. Unlike Ducane, however, Effingham experiences no lasting

effect from this vision, and when he returns to the ordinary world, he is unchanged. The challenge, therefore, has failed to bring about any improvement in him as a human being. It would seem, then, that Murdoch sees little hope for the modern realist. Yet there is Marian, also a quester, and if there is any hope in this novel, it is with her, for she is not ineffectual. Marian's part in the drama is that of being an adversary to Gerald Scottow. If Scottow represents the evildoer, does Marian, then, represent the good? In Murdoch's thinking the answer to this question is probably yes. For as it has been shown, Scottow's world is that of the traditional and Christian good versus evil. That world, to Murdoch, is unreal and ineffectual. Both the good and the evil of this world are essentially mute. Also, Marian is one who acts, and though she may not have brought about any demonstrable good effect nor even understood what she should have done, she nonetheless acted in good faith, freeing Hannah though the result of the act was death. For Murdoch, however, Hannah's death was necessary. For Hannah is the fairytale that must die along with Christianity if contemporary humans are to find an efficacious manner to live their lives, but finally, it is to Denis that one must turn for explanation.

Like Marian and Effingham, Denis, too, is one who quests. He, too, loves Hannah, but he fails to save her

with this love. For the love was not pure, not without hate, and for one to accomplish the good, there must be no hate. "I should have loved only and not hated at all. I should have stayed by her and suffered with her, beside her, becoming her....I am the most guilty. The guilt passes to me" (262). But he, in the true sense of Ate'--and like Tallis, takes the guilt away with him so that others will not suffer it, "bringing it for her [Marian], for the others, to an end" (263). In this sense he is the "good" character, the one who loses self completely to a cause greater than himself, a cause that focuses on the "other" as Murdoch would advocate. But in doing this, he also becomes Hannah in some convoluted and spiritual sense. Marian confirms this when she states, "Yes, you are becoming Hannah, now" (262). But to become Hannah is also to become Christian. Therefore, though Murdoch seems to renounce Christianity, there is perhaps the element of suffering that needs to survive--whether it be in Ate', in Christianity, or in the contingency of the world as Murdoch sees it. These somehow seem to ambiguously coexist, forcing one even to include Platonism as a possible avenue of salvation. For the bestowal of Hannah's estate to Max, which allegorically could be seen as the abdication of Christianity to Platonism, thus intertwines the two and binds them again to Ate' and, finally, also to Murdoch's conception of good.

All these seem to be embodied in the character of Denis, who is ultimately--the unicorn.

In conclusion, the challenged and the challengers seem mainly to be symbolic, ultimately representatives of good and evil, and the challenge put forth appears to be how to reach the "good." In *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*, evil is the obvious winner, and although this novel is a comedy, its pessimism consigns it to black comedy, and is rather damning of man's attempts toward goodness. In it the high living, debonair Julius is victorious, in part because he fits so well into the upper middle class milieu. This must, therefore, be seen as a condemnation of the best the modern life has produced. The good, epitomized in Tallis, don't fit--a scathing denunciation, one which, in essence, condemns modern man. He has been challenged, and he has failed. In *The Unicorn*, however, there is a bit more hope, though certainly not the pleasant ending of *The Nice and the Good* or *The Green Knight*. The two worldly characters of *The Unicorn*, Marian and Effingham, return to contemporary civilization, one unaffected, essentially a failure, the other with some insight, but Denis, like Tallis goes off alone, ineffectual and without any power to move or change the world. They simply exist as good men in a contingent environment.

With this conclusion one is forced back to Murdoch's

philosophical position, a position which essentially discounts Christianity, romance, existentialism, even Platonism. In FHD the romance of the court does not endure, for it is rather easily disbanded--and dishonored in the process--because Rupert and Morgan have chosen to act out their romantic imaginings in the overly tolerant and materialistic society that indulges such behavior, an indulgence which will ultimately destroy it. One can see a parallel here to the court of Arthur, which was too tolerant of the adulterous actions that were immoral from a Christian point of view, actions that reflect codes of behavior that must be refuted. That Tallis continues to exist, however, is hopeful, but since he is ineffectual to change or influence the society in which he finds himself, the hope that he generates is mute and cannot prevent the self-destructive process. Also, if he is a symbol of Christ, then Christianity, too, is mute and ineffectual. Nor is more hope given in *The Unicorn*. Christianity, Platonism, romance, all belong in the past from which they came, archaic and futile to effect change. Yet still there is Ate'. In both Denis and Tallis the taking on of suffering to expiate the suffering of others still has value, as Christ's did, but all of these--Denis, Tallis, Christ--are beings set apart. They do not have influence in the real world. They simply exist as good beings. Only

Marian remains, she who quested for answers to alleviate pain, to overcome the evil, and she does returns to the real world. But unlike Effingham, who fails to achieve any metamorphosis, she returns only after affirming the good of Denis, and only after undergoing a personal change. So in her there is hope. She is not good in the sense of Tallis, a being who, like Christ, acts to overcome evil and commits none, but she takes her recognition of the good back with her to the everyday, ordinary world in which the rest of us must struggle, the world of *A Fairly Honourable Defeat*. But the fact that she is a part of this contingent modern world bodes well for contemporary society. In her there is a possibility of attaining the good, however small. In her there is yet hope--and that is all Iris Murdoch will grant us.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion one might ask what moral truth it is that Iris Murdoch wishes modern humankind to embrace. For Murdoch is a moralist, a philosopher who would have us take bits and pieces from past philosophical and religious systems and form them into a new whole that will provide modern beings with a basis for ethical action, a new romance that does not totally forsake the old, but one that sheds the trappings, the outer garments with which we have clothed it. It is important to realize, however, that Murdoch places our heritage of Judaism, Christianity and modern existentialism and the philosophical Platonism of the Greeks all within the framework of what she terms romance. All, says Murdoch, have been idealized beyond usefulness or have sunk into irrelevance.

To see proof of her renunciation of these philosophical-religious positions, one can look to the works with which this paper deals and the characterizations that represent these various creeds. As a failure of Judaism, one need only look to Lucas in *The Green Knight*, whose Judaism does not save him from the primitive and murderous rage that causes him to attempt the egregious murder of his brother, and despite the hope put in Mir as savior of both Lucas and the upper-middle class court, Mir is instead revealed as a charlatan whose mental instability takes away

all hope of religious guidance. Nor is there hope in Hannah, the Christ figure of *The Unicorn* who is debunked as a self-centered being imprisoned in an outworn creed, a creed that paralyzes and isolates one from the society in which it should operate. Christianity is a fairytale religion, romanticized and idealized so that even its kernel of goodness fails the modern world, and Leonard, the god of *A Fairly Honourable Defeat,* fares no better. He is a pain-wracked, cynical and blackly comic figure who rants and rails against a world gone wrong from the beginning. This god is dying, eaten away by a cancerous society whose hedonistic self-preoccupation is destroying it from within, a well-educated and materialistic society that welcomes the Satanic Julius King yet relegates the saintly and Christ-like Tallis to its outer fringes.

Nor does the wisdom of the Greeks offer much consolation to the contemporary human. It is epitomized in *The Unicorn's* philosopher-scholar Max, who merely gazes from afar at the machinations of the fairytale world at Gaze castle. The Greeks have nothing to offer. They too, are seemingly paralyzed to stop the carnage of lives that Max so distantly observes.

And what of the existentialist, he who glorifies the value of self and self alone? Iris Murdoch gives him no quarter, for she descries the self-centeredness that would

prevent the needed unselfing process. It is selflessness only that gives one an avenue to the "good."

Finally, what are the links Murdoch has to the medieval romance? Obviously, she makes use of its many characteristics, its challenge and challenger, its journey into chaos to find something of value, its tests of honor and moment of revelation, its circular structure, its use of the archaic, its final sacrifice and redemption, its multiple layers of meaning. She also, however, takes the code of courtly love and proposes to do precisely what it did in the Middle Ages--replace its value system with a new ethic. For as C. S. Lewis has noted, the courtly love code was an entirely new system of behavior which replaced that which had come before, and it is a code that has endured the centuries since its adoption all the way to the present. Now, however, says Murdoch, something new is needed. The old no longer is viable and must be replaced so that humankind can endure with dignity and meaning in life. But she will not have us dispense totally with all that has come before. She seems, instead, to find these beliefs and value systems necessary in the process of moving toward the final pinnacle of good. For the young still embrace the magical elements. There are the twins in *The Nice and the Good* who see the flying saucer at the novel's conclusion, a flight into the fantasy realm that seems needed for the young, but

one that must be dispensed with when one becomes a responsible adult. Moy must discard her telekinesis; Bellamy, his hope of a vision or sign that will solidify his Christianity; the Anderson court the redemption these magical and divine elements its savior, Mir, will bring. These cannot save, but they can be useful. They can give meaning and voice to a childhood that must use them as tools in the process of becoming. Romantic love, too, as in the courtly love code, has meaning, not in itself, but as an avenue to salvation. In essence, Iris Murdoch uses romance, both medieval and modern, to forge a contingent reality that looks back to the fire that cleansed and refined it and forward to the steely cold reality that is Iris Murdoch's "good."

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